

CELTIC EVANGELISM IN RURAL AMERICA:  
CREATING CONTEMPORARY OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES  
USING ANCIENT METHODS

A THESIS

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First, this project is dedicated to my amazing companion, colleague, and partner in ministry: my loving wife, Karen, who encouraged me to keep working when I would have rather been playing video games.

Second, the growing disciples at the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church who made this project possible. Thank you for your patience and support.

Third, many thanks go to Rob Mitchell and all my friends from Hawick in the Scottish Borders who have shown us true hospitality, and extended many warm welcomes to my family and me over the years. Your kindness has given us a true sense of belonging, which played a major role in inspiring this project.

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.  
Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you  
to give a reason for the home that you have.

—1 Peter 3:15a

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## ABSTRACT

How can evangelism and discipleship be effective in rural small town America? How can evangelism and discipleship be effective in any postmodern/post-Christian ministry context? In the ancient world of the Celts—Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England—a method of evangelism and discipleship emerged that may be adapted to contemporary culture to answer these questions. Through the adaptation and application of principles of evangelism and discipleship utilized by ancient Celtic monastic communities, today's churches can reach their surrounding communities for Christ. This method can be especially effective in rural small towns, but the principles can be adapted to any ministry context. In obedience to the Great Commission, churches can utilize these ancient methods to make disciples, extend the knowledge of the supremacy of Christ, and bring greater glory to God.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

#### Introduction

The world is changing. Even remote parts of the world are being incorporated into the global village via communications technology. Changes in the world have resulted in changes in worldviews. Many who watch shifts and changes in Western culture say that the West has moved beyond the modern and into the post-modern era.<sup>1</sup> The notion that truth can be discovered by the scientific method and rational thinking is no longer a universal claim. People are more comfortable with mystery. Christians who watch Western culture hold that we are moving into a post-Christian era. People consider truth relative to a person's environment and worldview, not simply derived and memorized from the Bible. Since the world and all of its people groups are just a mouse click away, individuals in even the most remote parts of the West have endless choices of culture in which they can immerse, and endless communities of which to be a part. These choices include what religion or combination of religious practices to adopt. Spirituality is a popular topic, but the term is not necessarily synonymous with Christianity. Post-modernism and post-Christian worldviews have reached and begun to transform even small, rural, remote towns in the Western hemisphere.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Christianity is still expanding within this changing world. Jesus' disciples throughout the world must still consider Jesus' Great Commission: "Then

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in Postmodern Church and Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 3-4.

Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,'" (Matthew 28:18-20, NIV)<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, empowered by the Holy Spirit, Jesus' disciples continue to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The ancient commands of Jesus must be carried on despite the changing world.

Even though Jesus' disciples still have a mission to accomplish, the changing world necessitates some adjustments in strategy. Methods that just a few decades ago were effective, may not work now. Different ministry contexts, different worldviews, and broader social experiences challenge Jesus' disciples to effectively do the work of evangelism. The mission remains the same. The essential components of the gospel remain the same, but the evangelistic approach must be examined and adjusted with consideration of the shifting contexts into which the gospel must penetrate. The post-modern/post-Christian world necessitates a revised contextualization of the essential gospel message to continue the mission Jesus gave to his disciples.

In many ways, this sounds like a problem for the foreign mission field, or possibly urban areas of North America. Small towns surely must still be untouched by these modern, or post-modern ways of thinking. Isn't the church still as central to small town community life today as it was fifty or even hundred and fifty years ago? Not necessarily; through advances in technology, even the smallest town residents have windows on a larger world. The Internet and satellite TV have increased

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<sup>3</sup> The NIV Study Bible, New International Version, Kenneth L. Barker, gen ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985). All Scripture References are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

awareness of other religions and cultures. People in small communities have begun to question the exclusive claims of the Bible regarding God's people, judgment, and salvation. Many wonder if God could condemn people just because they practice another religion, or because they grow up in a part of the world where Christianity has not been proclaimed. Small town church Sunday school classes often discuss questions like, "What about the people who have never had a chance to hear the gospel? Will God send them to hell? Is it fair for God to do this?" With unshaded windows on the world, even people from small, rural settings are concerned for their lost neighbors in the global village.

In her book *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle proposes that Western culture is undergoing a re-formation and that Western Protestant Christians are examining the authority of Scripture when it comes to the choices available to them and to other cultures.<sup>4</sup> Still, as worldly ideas seep into small towns, Jesus' disciples must consider how best to contextualize the gospel message for small town residents as well.

Thus, the problem is that those within the immediate ministry context of small, rural churches need to hear the good news about Jesus, and be invited into lives of discipleship. With their window on the larger world and its various perspectives, the essential gospel message must be contextualized in a way that people in and around small, rural towns can effectively communicate it. What strategies might be

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<sup>4</sup>Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008). Tickle traces various events from the turn of the twentieth-century from science, Biblical criticism, philosophy, politics, technology, and sociology very succinctly in chapter 5 (pp. 63-117). Her conclusion is that Western culture has found that the authority of Scripture as held by the sixteenth-century Reformers has been damaged by these events, and is currently under examination. She maintains that the Church in the West is searching for a new source of authority. While her conclusions in the book may not be entirely correct, she illustrates a view of Scripture and authority that is characteristic of postmodernism, and should be considered for effective evangelism.



implemented to solve this problem? Though the world is changing, the mission remains the same.

In examining the small, rural community, one finds that each is a microcosm of the global village. The problems of the larger world are not so different from the problems of rural communities. On a mission trip a few years ago, a young pastor from a small town, namely myself, took his youth group to a big North American city. The leaders of the mission organization hosting the youth group made much of the problems permeating the city. She discussed the variety of cultures within the city, crime, drug abuse, homelessness, and cultural clashes. It occurred to the young pastor that similar problems existed within the small town, just not as concentrated as in the big city. Though vastly different in scope, the small town ministry context held similar challenges for outreach, evangelism, and discipleship. The ends of the earth were not so far away, and they must still be reached for Christ. Jesus' disciples must make still more disciples in obedience to the Great Commission.

The goal of this thesis project is to determine an effective strategy for reaching small town communities with the message of the gospel, and make disciples in obedience to the Great Commission. While there are many ways to impact a community—small and rural or otherwise—the primary impact that a church can have centers on evangelism and discipleship. Does the small, rural church need to invent a new approach to evangelism and discipleship in order to have an impact for the kingdom of God? Is there a lesson from history—a similar cultural shift or ministry context that can shed light on fulfilling the Great Commission in the present day?

This thesis-project will examine the challenges of post-modern/post-Christian movements as they reach small rural communities. Additionally, this project proposes that a solution to effective evangelism and discipleship within such a rural, small town ministry context can be drawn from an ancient Christian source, namely, the Celtic Monastic movement of the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. The project will test this solution in three ways. First, members of the church who live and work in the larger community will be interviewed in order to find out how they make use of their strategic locations for evangelism or outreach. The second part will be a survey of one small town church to find its strengths, highlighting those strengths that are similar to the ways of Celtic monastic communities. Third, a small group will be developed that will study evangelistic methods of Celtic monastic communities that may be incorporated into the evangelistic outreach and discipleship of the local church. Finally, this thesis proposes that a method of effective evangelism based on the Celtic Monastic movement can be transferred to many ministry contexts affected by current cultural shifts.

### **The Setting**

Not everyone lives in a big city. There are many resources available for reaching people in urban areas in any country around the world. There are resources and strategies for reaching Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. There are books on apologetics and strategies for reaching agnostics and atheists. As recently as 1987, the Urbana Missions Conference attended by this author encouraged people to be concerned about Nineveh, that great city in the Book of Jonah in which so many lived

who did not know God. The conference urged prospective missionaries to consider evangelism in the great population centers around the world in which lost people lived and died without having a chance to hear the gospel. However, there are also rural areas in the North America where the gospel needs to be preached, and where people need to be invited to live lives of Christian discipleship. Is the Great Commission not concerned for those in the small, rural areas as well? What strategies can be implemented to reach those in such a ministry context with the gospel?

Wyalusing, PA is in many ways a typical small town in rural America. The population of the Wyalusing Borough in 2009 was 531 residents, down nearly six percent from 2000.<sup>5</sup> The estimated population for the area sharing the same zip code as Wyalusing in 2009 was 3849.<sup>6</sup> The population is nearly evenly divided between men (44%) and women (56%), and nearly all of the residents are white.<sup>7</sup> There is only a small percentage other races currently in the Borough and Township. Local industry and factories around Wyalusing are the main employers. Most of the work is blue-collar—manufacturing and construction—with some working in farming and forestry. Area schools and medical services employ many of the female residents,

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<sup>5</sup> “Wyalusing, Pennsylvania,” City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wyalusing-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> “18853 Zip Code Detailed Profile,” City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/zip/18853.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> “Wyalusing, Pennsylvania,” City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wyalusing-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

each industry providing 16% of the work for women.<sup>8</sup> The median age for Wyalusing Borough is 45,<sup>9</sup> while the median age within the zip code is 40.<sup>10</sup>

Two changes are breaking into the demographics of the Wyalusing area that must be noted. First, there has been an influx of Spanish-speaking people. People come into the area from Latin America to work at the stone quarries and natural gas wells that litter the mountainsides. The longtime residents have yet to bridge cultural gaps and overcome language barriers for these new residents in order to welcome them to town. This change adds a layer to the problem of evangelism and discipleship in and around Wyalusing.

The second change has to do with rising energy prices in the US. When oil prices surpassed \$50.00 per barrel around 2005,<sup>11</sup> energy producers began to look for cheaper alternatives for fuel. Natural gas companies targeted northeastern Pennsylvania's deep shale deposits as one source of fuel. Representatives of these companies have said that the natural gas pockets trapped in these shale deposits are among the largest ever discovered. In 2006, companies began to move into the area for research. In 2008 and 2009, they began constructing wells, and pumping out natural gas.

Aside from environmental changes, property owners are becoming millionaires overnight. So another layer to the problem of evangelism and discipleship in this small town has to do with people who have suddenly become

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<sup>8</sup> "Wyalusing, Pennsylvania," City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wyalusing-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> "Wyalusing, Pennsylvania," City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wyalusing-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> "18853 Zip Code Detailed Profile," City-data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/zip/18853.html> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> "History of Illinois Basin Posted Crude Oil Prices," [http://www.ioga.com/Special/crudeoil\\_Hist.htm](http://www.ioga.com/Special/crudeoil_Hist.htm) (accessed September 16, 2009).

wealthy and the accompanying widening of the separation between economic classes.

"For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil..." (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Sudden wealth and the evils that come with it have cracked the formerly humble community values of Wyalusing.

A third change is adjunct to the rise of gas wells. Geology.com reports, "The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection reports that the number of drilled wells in the Marcellus Shale has been increasing rapidly. In 2007 only 27 Marcellus Shale wells were drilled in the state, however, in 2010 the number of wells drilled had risen to 1386."<sup>12</sup> This increase is a mixed blessing, with some getting rich quick, as stated above, and others finding themselves stuck with property losing its value.<sup>13</sup> With the increases in the number of wells has come an increase in workers living in the area. Many of these people have moved here from out of state. In the fall semester of 2008, the principal of the Wyalusing District elementary schools reported that he has been informed that natural gas companies will soon begin to move whole families with their workers into the area. These families represent all income levels and different values, and they will certainly broaden the demographic spectrum represented in Wyalusing. The current residents will have to be prepared for these changes. The local churches will have to prepare for these changes to its ministry context as well.

These changes are having an impact on long time residents of the Wyalusing area, but the core values of the community have so far remained intact. Although, some are reluctant to welcome new residents, especially those of Latin American

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<sup>12</sup> <http://geology.com/articles/marcellus-shale.shtml> (accessed February 22, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Hargreaves, *Gas Boom Mints Instant Millionaires* ([http://money.cnn.com/2010/10/06/news/economy/penn\\_community/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2010/10/06/news/economy/penn_community/index.htm)) (accessed February 22, 2011).

descent, many have welcomed new neighbors.<sup>14</sup> Despite the potential wealth, some would rather preserve the quiet, neighborly ways and conservative values of this old farming community. Others simply accept the changes as unavoidable. Either way, from the standpoint of evangelism and discipleship, the church must develop effective ways to reach everyone in the community, including the new residents and newly wealthy.

Presently, Wyalusing remains a quaint community off the beaten path of Eastern Seaboard travel. The streets are relatively quiet, except when a kid with nothing better to do cruises through town with his car stereo blaring. People get annoyed, but everyone knows who the delinquents are, so they shake their heads and utter a prayer for his safety. If it gets too loud, everyone knows where he lives, and will kindly ask him to tone it down. The neighborhoods are friendly. Retirees and young families mix together well, and it is rare that one walks into town without stopping to chat at least once along the way. Children ride their bicycles around town, and everyone keeps an eye on them for safety's sake. Norman Rockwell would have had a great deal of subject matter in the Wyalusing area.

This is not to say that Wyalusing does not have its problems. There are some existing problems with drugs and more with alcohol abuse. There is criminal activity related to both. During a recent visit by one of the local Cub Scout packs to the state police barracks, one state trooper reported that alcohol is involved in nearly every call to which the police respond. Occasionally, state police crack small drug rings or

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<sup>14</sup> It must be said that any new residents in small communities like Wyalusing are often kept at arms length, some for years and years. They are viewed as "newcomers" or "flatlanders," and there is always some reluctance to allow them into the most intimate circles of friends. However, as trust is built, these new residents might find a true home in a town like Wyalusing.

discover methamphetamine manufacturing in the woods around farming areas. The absence of local police has led to increases in vandalism and burglary in recent years. Homelessness is on the rise in the entire region as incoming gas workers and their families take over available housing, and do so with the means to pay much more for rent than the local residents. There is little space for those with low income and transients who until recently could easily find a hotel room for a night. These people simply have no place to stay. Although on a smaller scale, urban problems exist even in Wyalusing. Still, Wyalusing is mostly a quiet town. Many people who grow up and move away from the area for higher education, come back to raise their families here because they like the values of the community. For this reason, Wyalusing has maintained consistently strong family and community values despite the problems.

There are three churches in the Wyalusing Borough, with several more in the surrounding area. Two of the three in-town churches are over 125 years old, and have been centers of community life in the past. The highest religious affiliations are United Methodist (26%) and Roman Catholic (29%). Other residents attend Independent Baptist Churches, unaffiliated fundamentalist churches, or charismatic churches near the Borough. Eight percent of the population is Presbyterian (USA).<sup>15</sup>

Membership in these churches has fluctuated only slightly in the last fifteen years. The area churches often work together to support local missions or for summer Vacation Bible Schools, creating a refreshing air of cooperation that is often missing in suburban or urban areas.

A typical Sunday service at any of the three in-town churches attracts less than one hundred worshipers in each church. Church members and clergy frequently

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.city-data.com/city/Wyalusing-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed March 2, 2011)

complain that the town has become increasingly secularized. Stores and restaurants are open during worship hours. Youth sports leagues operate on Sundays. Even if these sports are scheduled for afternoons, many families skip church to get their children ready for the game. An open gym or sporting event at the high school usually means low attendance at church activities throughout the week. Clergy and church leaders agree that these events and activities keep many potential worship attendees from making commitments to local churches. This is evidence that the small town, rural church that was once central to the life of the community has become marginalized, no longer having the impact or influence that it once had. In addition, this is a symptom of an increasingly post-Christian culture throughout North America.

Phyllis Tickle aptly describes this problem of church marginalization as one arising in the 20th century that helped to bring on a major shift by the beginning of the new millennium. She attributes the introduction of the affordable automobile to North American society to the decentralization of the local church within the community:

[The car] freed Americans to roam at will, thereby loosening them from the physical ties that had bound earlier generations to one piece of land, one township, one schoolhouse, and one community-owned consensual illusion, of which a large component was the community church. The affordable car enabled city dwelling in a way that had not been possible for many Americans in the past. It also provided, very early, the mechanism by which what had been the Sabbath became Sunday instead. Within a few decades, the Tin Lizzie and her offspring would so erode the Sabbath that Sunday would become the day for shopping, for mall visits, movies, and dozens of Little League games, not to mention a significant number of major league ones. Sunday evening services all but disappeared; and early Sunday morning ones (or Saturday evening ones) were invented in order to allow the faithful to get



their Sabbath worship over and done with early enough so that there would still be some Sunday left to enjoy.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, later developments of television and the Internet have further eroded the traditional way of keeping the Sabbath holy. The fellowship of believers with which so many connected in the past has become just one more club, one more unwanted newsletter, and maybe even one more appeal for charitable contributions. The church's entertainment value cannot compete with whatever else is out there. And with local industry paying time-and-a-half or in some cases double-time, even work has more appeal to financially over extended families. Tickle gives communities like Wyalusing something to consider as they struggle with why people find other things to do besides go to church on Sundays. As postmodernism encroaches and churches are further marginalized, the choices of how to spend one's time are endless, even in small towns. However, the Great Commission still stands before churches like those of Wyalusing.

On the positive side, there is camaraderie and positive energy among the worshiping community. Fellow Christians gather for planned ecumenical events during holiday seasons. Ash Wednesday, Holy Week, and special days of prayer provide opportunities for the churches of Wyalusing to gather together. It is not unusual for members of different churches to have coffee together and even pray with one another without fear of ridicule. Recently, a group of Christians from different churches in and around Wyalusing have been meeting together to pray for revival with a goal have having a one-day revival event at the end of the summer of 2010. The group continues to reach out to and invite other area clergy to join in this effort.

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<sup>16</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 86.

In terms of ministry context, this cooperative mindset can yield progressive results toward accomplishing the Great Commission in and around Wyalusing.

The Wyalusing Presbyterian Church (WPC) sits in the heart of town. Historically, the church membership has consisted of some of the wealthier Wyalusing residents. Currently, the membership of 186 active adults represents a moderate level of income. Teachers, factory workers, farmers, food service workers, a few professionals, and retirees worship together at WPC. The members are fairly evenly distributed between 20-35 year olds, 35-55 year olds, and 55-70 year olds. The oldest member is 98 years old, and some his family is still active in the church. The church family received three new members by confirmation in 2009 between the ages of fourteen and fifteen, which is a typical confirmation class. Young families are prominent and welcome at WPC. Seven families with children under five years old regularly attend worship and social activities. Though small, the membership at WPC grows by a few each year, usually keeping just ahead of older members who pass away. WPC is a welcome presence in the town, although it is not as central to the culture as it once was.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Problem**

Growth at WPC is a challenge. This growth can be broken down into two areas: spiritual growth (or growth in discipleship) and numerical growth. Everyone wants WPC to grow, but most people put numerical growth ahead of spiritual growth. Further, there is a general view that the pastor is the one responsible for this

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<sup>17</sup> The WPC Session Clerk and myself compile these demographics from the Annual Statistical Report of the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church in January, 2010.

numerical growth. Historically, church members have felt that if the pastor preaches good sermons and visits people in the community, numerical growth will increase. The current pastor repeatedly emphasizes that spiritual growth will eventually lead to numerical growth because a spiritually mature Christian understands the importance of faith sharing and disciple-making. Obedience to and fulfillment of the Great Commission to make disciples in all nations is becoming a high priority. Jesus commissioned his disciples to make more disciples in all nations, and if the members of the church are truly disciples, then they should be working to fulfill Jesus' commission. However, the general perspective of the members is that if more people fill the pews, WPC is growing.

As far as outreach and personal evangelism go, a number of years ago one elder made the statement at a Session meeting that if people wanted to come to our church, they could read the sign out front, check the time, and come in if they wanted to. People have had a negative view of evangelism, equating it with the door-to-door visits characteristic of local Jehovah's Witnesses, whom they find intrusive. In terms of spiritual growth, discipleship is a new concept for this church. Few adults within the congregation attend Sunday school, with only a handful more attending Bible studies throughout the week. The members of the Session have historically seen themselves as administrative leaders, not spiritual leaders for the congregation. How does a leader in a rural small town church meet the challenge and change the congregation's perspective on meaningful church growth? Though WPC has a positive reputation and gets along well with neighboring churches, growing new disciples is still a persistent challenge.

## **An Ancient Solution to a Modern Problem?**

It is possible that a new solution to the problems of evangelism and discipleship need not be created from scratch. A look through church history reveals a somewhat similar ministry context in ancient times. Those who sought to make disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission during that time period were overwhelmingly successful. Perhaps learning and implementing their mindset towards the church as a community of disciples, as well as their strategies for reaching the lost with the gospel, will provide some solutions for churches in small, rural settings like WPC.

Imposing an overlay of the ministry context of sixth century Ireland, Scotland and Northern England over the Wyalusing area, one would find similarities that can help WPC with its growth problems, discipleship, and outreach. The ancient Celtic monastics established outposts for the church in pagan areas near tribal villages. They engaged in commerce and developed relationships with villagers and local authorities, keeping the doors of the monastic communities open to inquirers.<sup>18</sup> WPC could imitate these ancient Celtic monastics and their evangelistic efforts by viewing itself as a ministry outpost in an increasingly post-modern/post-Christian context. Not only might WPC keep its doors open to welcome any who might come through to inquire or experience, but the members of WPC who regularly work and socialize with others in the community can learn to be ready to share their faith when an opportunity arises. This calls for training within the church. In addition, each spiritually growing member must learn to maintain a self-awareness of their

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<sup>18</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

relationship with God throughout the week. They must take on the identity of "Christ's ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20) when they are at large in the community. Church members can learn such lessons from the Celtic monastics.

What is the mission field like in Wyalusing? Wyalusing is filled with what many residents call "good people who work hard all of their lives," as nearly every funeral service for unchurched people in the area reveals. Over the years, this notion has perpetuated the idea that all of these "good, hardworking people" are in God's favor. This is not the only misconception in this rural area. As post-modern thinking has seeped into the community mindset, even people in the churches are questioning Biblical authority, challenging the notion of *sola scriptura*, and coming up with their own ideas. Rather than reading their Bibles to understand what God says about being one of God's people, residents of Wyalusing decide what to believe relative to their own thoughts on the way things ought to be.

The local mission field is broader due to the influx of new residents from other parts of the US as a result of the gas wells as well as immigrants from Latin America. These new residents bring more post-modern thinking into the area. The Latin American residents bring the challenge of cross-cultural evangelism to the doorsteps of the Wyalusing churches. Further, these new residents are primarily in the area to work. They may have little regard for Christianity and little respect for local churches. The gas companies and other industries they work for do not respect the churches, as is shown by their twenty-four hour-seven-days-a-week operating schedules.

How does the ministry context in Wyalusing compare with the ministry context of the Celtic evangelists of antiquity? First, the Celtic evangelists ministered in a rural setting in which people lived close to nature. Wyalusing is a rural town, and its citizens appreciate their proximity to the flora and fauna. Wyalusing's citizens grow food, and there are many farmers in the area. They also hunt deer, bear, and turkey for food. Fishing is important to the people. Many people spend time on the river or in the wooded hills surrounding the town. There are even some practitioners of Wicca, in which elements of nature are held in worshipful esteem perhaps borrowing from the Celtic druidic paganism. The Wiccans worship the created rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Still, as they ancient Celtic monastics reached the pagans within their ministry context, so might the Christians of Wyalusing be inspired to reach practitioners of Wicca in their own area. Their closeness to nature could serve as a bridge for Jesus' disciples to contextualize the gospel. The people of Wyalusing share a common appreciation of nature with the people of ancient Ireland and Scotland.

Second, like the ancient ministry contexts of the Celtic monastics, Wyalusing is a spiritual community. Not everyone is Christian here, although there are three churches in town and several more in the surrounding townships. One member of the community expressed a view of spirituality that is unfortunately common in the area. This person used a buffet as an illustration of all of the religions that God put into the world from which people can choose which practices they want to incorporate in their spirituality. As stated above, there are practitioners of Wicca in the area. Some have made up a spirituality based on their own work ethic. Wyalusing and the

surrounding area are filled with "good and hardworking" people. In other words, there is a sense that if a person acknowledges that there is a God or god, and lives a life that by some unwritten standard is considered "good," then they don't have anything to worry about. Sometimes this point of view creates a good environment for discussion of religious themes and spirituality. However, when one begins to narrow the discussion down to evangelical Christianity, the "spiritual" person falls on the increasingly familiar post-modern mantra, "If that works for you, that's great, but it doesn't work for me."<sup>19</sup> At least, like the ancient Celtic climate, spirituality is within the realm of discussion with many people in the community, and that gives potential to invite people to consider a life of following Jesus.

A third similarity between the ancient Celtic monastic ministry context and Wyalusing has to do with the church's proximity to the larger community. The Celtic monastic communities established their territory close to the tribal communities in order to interact with villagers with the intention of bring Christ to them. The churches of Wyalusing, especially WPC, are right in the heart of town. Commerce happens all around these churches all week long. Members of the church are strategically located in local businesses, industries, and the school system so that they can be a Christian influence. All that is lacking is the church members' awareness that God has them strategically located at their work and in their social settings for a reason: to be Christ's ambassadors: to live out and tell the gospel, and to invite people to a life of discipleship.

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<sup>19</sup> Ajith Fernando makes this case and provides examples in Chapter 1 of *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2001), see especially pp. 15-20.

There is another important commonality between the ministry context of the ancient Celts and modern Wyalusing: hospitality. The Celtic monastic community valued hospitality. The paradigm for discipleship within that community was as follows:

**Belong→ Become/Behave→ Believe**

Or, as George Hunter, III phrases this paradigm:

**Fellowship→ Ministry and Conversions→ Belief, Invitation to Commitment<sup>20</sup>**

To summarize Hunter's explanation of this paradigm, the community welcomed an inquirer, and involved that person in the existing life of the community. As the one learned and engaged in community life, one's behavior changed. In time, through participation in the life, work, and worship of the community, one reflected upon the belief system of community members. When that person was ready, they became full members of the community through baptism, committing themselves to Christ and to a life of discipleship.<sup>21</sup> The inquirers' initial contact with the community came through the community's high emphasis on hospitality.

WPC has the potential to emulate Celtic monastic hospitality. Visitors often remark that they feel welcomed and at home when they attend worship at WPC, even if they have no prior church experience. The "belonging" part is in place already. Should WPC firm up the discipleship and spiritual growth mechanisms within the life of the church, those visitors would have a better opportunity to grow spiritually—the "behaving" part. As members live out their lives and interact with people who are

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<sup>20</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 53.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 55. Also, Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 159. Tickle refers to *belong-behave-believe* as a paradigm shift from the traditional evangelical paradigm of *believe-behave-belong*. She observes that emerging church is adopting this paradigm shift.



new to the community, perhaps the "believing" component would follow as well. George Hunter says of the Celtic monastic communities, "... When seekers were welcomed into the fellowship, the faith was 'more caught than taught.'"<sup>22</sup> WPC's guide is the Celtic monastic community.

Of course, there is much dissimilarity between twenty-first century Wyalusing and the ancient Celtic culture. For one thing, the church is not a cloistered monastic community in which members live and work together in a compound following a community rule of life beneath the oversight of a resident abbot. While it is not impossible, morning and evening worship services with the church family do not bracket the days. Technology and transportation carry residents far away each day for work and shopping. Additionally, technology provides a window on a much larger world so that people from this rural small town can connect with and communicate with people nearly anywhere. Worldviews from institutions of higher learning combined with content from the Internet have created a pluralistic culture even in such a remote area. These realities create significant differences between Wyalusing and the ancient Celtic world.

And yet, it is because of some of these differences that postmodernism has entered the ministry context, and the churches of Wyalusing have been marginalized. By adopting the mindset of a Celtic-like monastic community, WPC may begin to see itself as an outpost of God's kingdom in the pluralistic, postmodern, post-Christian culture of Wyalusing.

Two fundamental questions sum up the challenges in Wyalusing as the world's changes seep into the small town ministry context. First, do the members of

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<sup>22</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 56.

WPC know how to reach out to the members of their community with the gospel? In other words, do they know how to do the work of evangelism? Second, is the church prepared to make disciples? Can the Celtic monastics provide an effective method within the church for welcoming new people, and helping them understand what Jesus has done for them, and helping them grow spiritually? This thesis seeks to answer these questions. In the next chapter, the Biblical and theological foundations for understanding and responding to these questions will be developed.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

#### **Introduction**

There are two paradigms to consider in developing a theological framework for the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church. The first includes the components of such a framework: evangelism, discipleship, community, and revival. The second paradigm includes the flow of the items in the first paradigm: belong, behave, and believe. This flow from belonging to believing is the opposite of the primary way the evangelical church in the West has practiced evangelism and discipleship over the last few decades. In the past, the church has sought to elicit a conversion from people utilizing a more confrontational or propositional approach to evangelism. Belief came first. In the current postmodern culture where truth is relative and spirituality is pluralistic in nature, an evangelist might find it difficult to persuade someone to believe right on the spot. Therefore, evangelism may take longer to reach the desired goal of conversion. One can invite a lost person into a vital community of disciples so that over time, as the potential believer experiences the life of the community and learns the community's patterns of behavior (discipleship), he or she may come to faith in Christ (belief).<sup>1</sup> This flow creates space for evangelism and discipleship to take place: within the community of believers. Revival reignites the church's passion for its evangelistic mission. Undergirding all of the above is the main purpose for

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 159.

evangelism, discipleship, and the church's presence in the world: the glory of God, knowledge of God's supremacy, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The work of the ancient Celtic evangelists like Patrick, Aidan, Columba, and Cuthbert teaches the church of the postmodern world what these two paradigms look like.<sup>3</sup> Although these evangelists entered a largely pre-Christian or nominally Christian culture, their approach informs evangelism in our culture today because of the parallels in how people view the world around them. In their worldviews, people are no longer bound by the scientific method as they understand truth, especially spiritual truth. Like the ancient Celts, people in the current culture consider themselves very spiritual, and may even incorporate some Christian teaching within the smorgasbord of other viewpoints as they form a personal spirituality.<sup>4</sup> Religious experience is important to postmodern people, but they may reject any moral restrictions or institutional dogma that goes with it.<sup>5</sup> Thus, people may be open to conversing with Christians, even though they may not be willing to engage in a propositional argument ending with their conversion to Christianity. Still, the Celtic evangelists gradually overwhelmed the people of their time with the gospel, transformed their pagan culture, and according to Thomas Cahill, may have saved civilization.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993, 2003), 17.

<sup>3</sup> George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 97.

<sup>5</sup> Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 196.

There are several theological components to consider. Evangelism is a key component for the New Testament church, but the Old Testament anticipates the end results of evangelism, as well: conversion, or to make more disciples (Matthew 28:19).<sup>7</sup> Thus, discipleship goes hand in hand with evangelism, as new Christians are welcomed into the community and guided through means of growth to spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11-13). Christian community is the context for growth. Revival is an important element impacting the church at all levels as the Holy Spirit that rekindles passion for accomplishing the church's God-given mission. With such passion, the church works to maximize the glory of God in the world and to increase knowledge of the supremacy of Christ.

In the postmodern context, the Celtic evangelistic model provides guidance. George Hunter draws this conclusion in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. He along with the likes of Brian McLaren and Phyllis Tickle show that churches in the postmodern West need a new paradigm for making disciples. Instead of working from the paradigm utilized throughout the modern era—believe, behave, belong—the churches of the postmodern West who are realistic about evangelism and discipleship can adopt and adapt the paradigm that the ancient Celtic evangelists employed—belong, behave, believe.<sup>8</sup> This paradigm de-emphasizes the confrontational evangelism technique of going door to door and propositionally presenting the gospel to elicit a conversion on the spot. Instead, the Celtic paradigm emphasizes the creation of long-term trusting relationships with people within one's sphere of influence, a welcoming community of growing disciples, and the opportunity for

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<sup>7</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 68.

those who are curious about following Jesus to enter that community without being threatened. In time, the potential disciple joins in the practices of the community, and hopefully catches on to the Christian faith lived out in the context of the community.<sup>9</sup> This flow from initial invitation and inclusion in the community (belonging) to profession of faith (believing) involves intentional efforts by the believing community to make disciples, but trusts that the Holy Spirit is working through the relationships and involvement in the community's faith practice. Ultimately, the most important aspect of the Celtic paradigm is the glory of God and the growth of God's kingdom because more people grow into discipleship, learn of the supremacy of Christ, submit to Christ's Lordship, engage in meaningful worship, get involved in ministry within their Christian community, and take on the mission of the church in the world.

The church builds upon this foundation of God's glory and the supremacy of Christ. Ultimately, this is the church's mission. In the opening chapter of his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, John Piper states clearly, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is."<sup>10</sup> Worship entails ascribing to God the glory due God's name. As the church takes on its mission of reaching all nations with the gospel, it does so not to earn favor with God or to build up the membership and budget of the local church, but to spread the renown of God's name. Disciples of Jesus take on the mission of spreading the gospel in obedience to his great commission, but they do this work so that more people can know God and worship God. As the church continues its evangelistic mission and makes more disciples, the community of people who submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ grows. More people worship God. Piper

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<sup>9</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 54.

<sup>10</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 17.

continues his thought, "When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever."<sup>11</sup>

The theological framework for this project includes evangelism, discipleship, revival, and the undergirding foundation of the glory of God. We engage in evangelism to bring glory to God, and spread the knowledge of the supremacy of Christ. The church has a responsibility to make disciples who live in submission to Christ, the Supreme Lord of all, and who seek to honor him in all they do (Colossians 3:17). Revival renews people's faith in God, draws them back under God's sovereignty, and reignites passion for the church's evangelistic and disciple-making mission. Revival renews worship and practical obedience to God's Word, which glorifies God. As people are drawn into (or back into) the church community, the church must facilitate discipleship and help people to grow in their relationship with God. The components of this framework must be more thoroughly defined, and, for the purposes of this project, examined in light of the Celtic monastic model.

So with a growing awareness of this foundation, the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church (WPC) is exploring the methods of Celtic evangelism and discipleship. The people of WPC are seeking ways to utilize their relationships within the community for evangelism: to initiate conversations about their relationship with God and invite those within their sphere of influence into the church community. Secondly, the people of WPC are seeking ways to involve those who enter into the life of the church (behave), utilizing the strengths of the church's personality in order to make disciples (believers). At the same time, members of WPC and neighboring churches are

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<sup>11</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 17.

gathering regularly to pray for revival in the greater Wyalusing community. As WPC continues to grow in spiritual maturity, it seeks to bring greater glory to God within the Wyalusing area through effective evangelism, disciple-making, and revival.

### Evangelism

David J. Hesselgrave says, "When our Lord said, 'And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come,' (Matthew 24:14), he used forms of three words most intimately related to that task: *κηρυσσω* (proclaim or announce), *μαρτυρεω* (bear witness), and *ευανγελιζω* ("gospelize" or evangelize)." <sup>12</sup> Hesselgrave points out that different church perspectives have emphasized one or the other of these words when strategizing about impacting the world for God's kingdom: from the perspective of the Reformed tradition—*κηρυγμα*—proclamation; from the perspective of conservatives—*ευανγγελιον* or telling the good news; and from the perspective of "the conciliar movement"—*μαρτυροσ*—witness. <sup>13</sup> Hesselgrave also discusses "dialogue," but concludes that dialogue as encouraged by the World Council of Churches in 1968 will bring few conversions to Christianity. Each of these words suggests important pieces of the church's task of spreading the news about Jesus to the world, even including dialogue. Each has its place in small town Christian outreach. All three terms are tied together for the purposes of evangelistic outreach and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

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<sup>12</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy: The Use of the Bible in Postmodern Church and Mission* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994), 89.

<sup>13</sup> Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 89.



First, *κερυσσω* is one of the central ways that the gospel is communicated within the church. The Directory for Worship (the middle section of *The Book of Order* of the PC [USA]) stresses the centrality of the Word in worship. The Bible is to be read and proclaimed as people gather around it regularly.<sup>14</sup> Every Sunday (and sometimes in other settings), Jesus' followers gather in the sanctuaries of their church buildings to give God glory through prayer, worship, and song. At WPC, the focal point of worship is the reading and proclamation of God's Word. As in Jesus' Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), the preacher proclaims a message from the Scripture among those who have gathered like a broadcast sower scatters seed in a field. Those who are gathered receive the message to various degrees, depending on the condition of their hearts. Some will receive the message, be transformed by the Word, and take it upon themselves to spread the good news of God's kingdom further (like the seed that falls on fertile ground which multiplies). Perhaps they spread the gospel through their personal relationships, teach it to their children, and/or talk about it at work. In any case, the process starts with *κερυσσω*—God's Word proclaimed.

An important aspect of *κερυσσω* is that it recognizes the transforming power of God's Word. Isaiah proclaimed:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it, (Isaiah 55:10-11).

God's Word has creative power, as Genesis 1 bears witness. God's Word has the power to reach and change hearts. In Acts 2, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>14</sup> *Book of Order*, W-2.2001 (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church [USA]).

proclaimed a message from the Lord calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day," (Acts 2:41). The author of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart," (Hebrews 4:12-13). In the present day, those who practice the proclamation of God's Word must intend similar personal transformations through its power, even though the numbers might not equal those of Peter's Pentecost message. Even so, *κερυγμα* must take place within the community of the church.

If the Parable of the Sower's message holds true, if individuals are transformed by *κερυγμα*, at some level they must be transformed into witnesses as the seed sown in their heart multiplies to a greater harvest. The basic meaning of the word *μαρτυρεω* means, "to bear witness." The apostles, transformed by their time following Jesus as disciples, were commissioned to be witnesses beginning in Jerusalem and spreading out to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As witnesses, they would seek to make more disciples by telling people about Jesus, teaching them what he taught, persuading them to believe in him, and be preparing to baptize converts according to the Great Commission. Luke demonstrates the success of their bearing witness throughout the Book of Acts.

It is reasonable to expect that those within the community of disciples are witnesses. They have experienced the transforming power of God's Word through proclamation (*κερυγμα*). The seed of the Word has been sown in fertile ground within their hearts. They are ready to multiply. They do so by telling other people

about their transformation. They testify to their families, friends, neighbors, co-workers—to all within their sphere of influence—about what Jesus has done for them. They need to be aware of their strategic locations as Christ's ambassadors who are in the world so that they can bring the message of reconciliation with God to people within their sphere of influence (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Depending upon their station in life, they may have to be subtle about this. Certainly, their behavior and character should demonstrate a life that has been transformed by the gospel message, providing a visible witness. Simply living life as a follower of Jesus provides a demonstration of the kingdom of heaven to those within their sphere of influence. Hopefully, living a transformed life creates opportunities for telling people about Jesus. That is *εὐαγγελίζω*—evangelism.

Simply put, *εὐαγγελίζω* is the sharing of one's faith in Christ for the purpose of persuading other people to believe. God chooses to use human instruments to bring about his plan of redemption. God used parents, prophets, priests, and kings to tell others about God, God's goodness, and God's covenant with people in the OT. Sometimes *κερυσσω* is the mode of evangelism, as with Peter in Acts 2. Other times, personal conversation is the mode, as described in Acts 8:26ff where Philip explains the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch leading to his conversion. In the NT, the apostles led, but all Christians begin to spread the gospel (Acts 8:1-4; 1 Peter 3:15).

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 provides Jesus' followers with their assignment. In his last words to the apostles recorded by Matthew, Jesus commissioned them to "...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them everything I have

commanded..." Although God could have miraculously revealed Jesus' identity to the whole world so that everyone alive would be compelled to declare him Lord, God gives the responsibility to Jesus' followers.

The word translated "evangelize," *ευανγελιζω*, means "preach the good news." *ευανγγελιον* or "Gospel" or "good news" is the subject of the preaching. Jesus' coming and bringing the kingdom of God to fruition in the New Testament is the essence of this good news proclamation. That Jesus brought to Creation the fullness of God's love heightens the meaning of *ευανγγελιον*. John wrote, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," (John 15:13). That is precisely what Jesus demonstrated through his death on the cross. Paul taught the heart of the redemptive nature of Jesus' coming in Romans 3:21-26. There he proclaims that Jesus' righteous life and sacrificial death are substituted for our sinful lives and just punishment (Romans 3:21-22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Through faith in Jesus, people are justified and welcomed into God's family (Romans 8:15-16). Essentially, Jesus did all of the work. Every person's responsibility is merely to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and to receive what he accomplished (John 3:16). As Jesus' followers, each person can become the person God wants them to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-30). That is the good news.

But how does one communicate such news in a postmodern/post-Christian world? Can Jesus' followers communicate the gospel to people in a less confrontational way? Can they communicate in a way that is open to listening to

others as well as telling what God has done in Christ? This is where dialogue comes in.

In the NT, *διαλεγομαι* (discuss, debate; address, speak) is used only four times, with three occurrences in Acts. In Acts 17, Paul travels to Athens, and interacts with the philosophers in the Aeropagus. Different translations render the form of *διαλεγομαι* as "disputed" (KJV), "reasoned" (NIV), and "argued" (NRSV). The idea is that Paul engaged in a two-way conversation with the people present as witnessed to the truth of the gospel. Such dialogue ought to be carefully considered in the overall work of evangelism in a postmodern ministry context. It allows for mutual respect in the conversation between a witness of who Jesus is and what he has done for people. It opens the door for ongoing communication that is marked by "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15-16). Even if one party to the dialogue insists on his or her own point of view, the witness has a chance to show kindness and respect as he or she awaits an opportunity to share their hope in Christ. Further, dialogue allows the witness to invite a person to explore the Christian community, where the love, worship, and life of that community can lead to transformation. Like Philip said to skeptical Nathaniel when inviting him to meet Jesus, through respectful dialogue, the witness can say, "Come and see," (John 1:44-46). Extended through dialogue, the invitation to belonging may lead to believing.

Hesselgrave both advises and warns on *διαλεγομαι*. Hesselgrave cautions the Church against the perspective and pronouncements of the World Council of Churches. The World Council of Churches has condemned "proselytization" between people of faith in favor of dialogue. He maintains that for Paul, dialogue was not just

to have a pleasant and engaging exchange of ideas, but that he wanted to persuade his hearers to believe in Jesus. Hesselgrave says, "What is in view, after all, is not the reputation of the believer but the salvation of the unbeliever; not the embracing of the Christian but the embracing of the Christ."<sup>15</sup> While the church may welcome seekers with varying worldviews and understandings of spirituality, and additionally enter into dialogue with them on these topics, the essential goal of communicating the truth of the gospel for the purpose of guiding the seeker to conversion must remain in view.

Here is one area where discipleship overlaps with evangelism in the postmodern ministry context. If the methods of the Celtic monastics are utilized, seekers who are welcomed into the church community need to be included in the life of the community of believers, especially in activities or disciplines leading to spiritual growth.<sup>16</sup> Whether this happens through small groups, personal study, or spiritual direction, the transforming word of God must remain central to the process. Its truth must not be compromised. If faith is to be caught, the community needs to uphold the essential tenets of that faith so that all within the Christian community can understand and live by those tenets. Dialogue can take place within the discipleship process, but the goal of the church is to move people from unbelief to belief in Christ.

Hesselgrave offers encouraging words on the topic of dialogue. "Historians often take note of the fact that, of all the intervening periods of history, our times are most like the Mediterranean world of the first century. Reframed in accordance with the first-century guidelines, might it not be that future dialogue with our world will

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<sup>15</sup> Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 48.

yield results similar to those achieved by the first-century church?"<sup>17</sup> With this in mind, the story of God's redemptive plan and how it has transformed each Christian's life can be communicated. Moving a bit further toward the present, Hunter proposes that the world of the ancient Celtic monastics parallels our own postmodern times.<sup>18</sup> As with Hesselgrave's statements, can the church not expect people to become disciples of Jesus Christ, acknowledging God's supremacy and living for God's glory with growth rates similar to those of the ancient Celtic world?

### **The Gospel as Story**

One of the most effective ways to do the work of evangelism in the postmodern context is to communicate God's plan of redemption in the form of a narrative: the story of how God saves the world. It is the stuff of Biblical theology, and it can be encapsulated for the seeker. In the postmodern ministry context (and parallel to the ancient Celtic context) story is often referred to as an important mode of communicating the gospel message.<sup>19</sup> Story or narrative can be preached (*κερυγμα*), put in the form of a dialogue, or born witness to, especially as the story touches the communicator (*μαρτυρεω*). The story itself is good news (*ευανγγελιον*). Whether in daily interaction with the larger community or within the church community, the gospel as story may effectively engage the lost in the postmodern world.

Prior to Jesus' coming, God had already enacted a plan to redeem Creation. Genesis 3 records the entrance of sin into the world, and humanity's consequent

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<sup>17</sup> Hesselgrave, *Scripture and Strategy*, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 62.

separation from God. Yet God's plan was in place, and God immediately revealed it to his people. In speaking a curse to the serpent, who deceived the woman into sin, God announced, "...And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel," (Genesis 3:15). Jesus' death was that costly strike to his heel, but it was a blow that crushed the serpent's head, smashing the consequences of sin for all who believe for all time (Hebrews 10:12). Even from the beginning, God had good news to announce to those who trusted God.

The meta-narrative of Scripture is the unfolding of God's redemptive plan, the revealing of the gospel, and the expansion of God's kingdom for all who believe. Generations after God introduced his plan to the first people, God chose one family to carry out the plan to redeem all of Creation. God called Abraham, and made a covenant with him. In Genesis 12:1-3, God proclaimed that God would bless all people through Abraham's family if Abraham (then called Abram) would follow.

Abraham believed God and followed God's leading. In Genesis 15 God confirmed his promise to Abraham in a covenant ceremony. Since Abraham believed God's promise enough to follow God, God credited Abraham's faithfulness to righteousness (Genesis 15:6). That meant that God accepted Abraham as good and without sin on the basis of his faith, not on the basis of living a life that was free from sin or on the basis of earned merit. This event serves as a precursor to those who would believe in God's salvation through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.

Paul comments on God's covenant with Abraham in Romans 4. He explains that Abraham was justified from his sin by his faith in God—faith that he



demonstrated by following God. God kept his promise to Abraham, eventually multiplying his descendants into the nation of Israel, as the rest of Genesis and Exodus shows. Genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace the lineage of Jesus through the offspring of Abraham. These two Gospels demonstrate God's faithfulness to keep the promise to Abraham, to bless people from all nations through faith in Jesus, and to fulfill the proclamation of Genesis 3—the seed of the woman—Jesus Christ, the Son of God and offspring of Eve—had come to crush the serpent's head.

The Prophets also anticipated the fulfillment of God's promises as they proclaimed the coming of the Messiah who would redeem the nation of Israel and draw even Gentiles into God's kingdom. For example, Isaiah 53 anticipates the Messiah as a punished servant who suffered as a substitute for God's people, a guilt offering on their behalf (Isaiah 53:10). Later, Isaiah speaks of the Messiah bringing restoration "...the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of despair," (Isaiah 61:1-3). Luke records that Jesus affirmed this passage as referring to himself (Luke 4:17-21).

Although these Old Testament passages are not the proclamation of Jesus' teaching and accomplishments in life, death, and resurrection, they lay the foundation of the New Testament and the event of Jesus coming. The New Testament begins with the Gospels, which narrate Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Acts of the Apostles narrates the commissioning Jesus' apostles, and the commencement of the

mission he gave them. Acts teaches about evangelism, and the history of the growth of God's kingdom through the expansion of the church. Acts 1:8 retells Jesus' commission to the Apostles: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Here, Luke outlines the spread of the gospel in ever-expanding regions until Jesus' followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, carry it all over the world. Even in these postmodern times, as the church—the global community of Jesus followers—continues this mission, each disciple becomes part of the story of how God is saving the world.

In the Epistles, Paul and other church leaders teach people how to be the church, how to live in obedience to Jesus, and how to honor him in their daily living. Additionally, the Epistles encourage Jesus' disciples to tell others about the Good News that has transformed their lives. Paul tells his readers that they have a responsibility to proclaim the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In Romans 10:14-15, Paul asks, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" Paul means for Jesus' followers to spread the message of what Jesus has done. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul calls himself and other Christians "ambassadors for Christ," and claims that Jesus' followers have a ministry of reconciliation, bringing people into a restored relationship with God as these followers proclaim Christ to them.

Perhaps the most readily applicable Biblical data on evangelism in postmodern/post-Christian times in the small town context comes from Peter. In 1 Peter 3:15-16, he tells 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” This teaching in 1 Peter informs Celtic evangelistic methods as well, encouraging disciples to utilize their relationships within the community as vehicles of communicating the story of how God saves the world—and especially their own story of what Jesus has done for them—as opportunities present themselves. In a small town like Wyalusing, most people know everyone. They see how a person acts, and they can easily make judgments about their character. If Christians are demonstrating the Good News, living as citizens of God's kingdom, obeying Jesus' teachings, and making use of opportunities to tell others what Jesus has done for them, then opportunities to do evangelism will emerge.

These Biblical roots make it clear that God has written Jesus' disciples into the story of how God saves the world. Each one has a part to play in this metanarrative. God has chosen human instruments to spread the gospel, and therefore, bring glory to God. The story of God's saving acts in the world did not end at the closing of Acts in the NT. God continued to use human instruments to transform the world as they communicated the gospel to Europe, Britain, and beyond. God continues to use followers of Jesus in this ever-unfolding story so that more

people may acknowledge the supremacy of God and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

### **The Small Town Context for Evangelism and Discipleship**

As WPC takes on its role in the story of how God saves the world, careful contextualization is necessary. What can WPC learn from Biblical sources and from the ancient Celtic evangelists' application of those sources that can help to effectively evangelize the greater Wyalusing area, invite people into the church community, and make disciples?

There are similarities between the culture of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Century British Isles into which Celtic missionaries like Patrick, Columba, and their followers immersed themselves. These similarities may provide a helpful strategy to fulfill the Great Commission in Wyalusing and other small rural towns. Settlements in ancient Ireland, Scotland, and Northern England could be like the small towns of North America. Both are somewhat remote, self-sustaining, and tightly knit. In this author's experience, both are made up of strong families. Both have their own unique traditions and perspectives. Both can be influenced by infiltration of elements from the larger world. In ancient times, this would have occurred through trade and through the church. In the postmodern context, this happens through media influence. In either case, the context for evangelism and discipleship is similar.

George Hunter explains the method utilized by Patrick of Ireland as he brought the gospel to ancient rural settlements of the Celtic world:

Upon arrival at a tribal settlement, Patrick would engage the king and other opinion leaders, hoping for their conversion, or at least their clearance, to

camp near the people and form into a community of faith adjacent to the tribal settlement. The 'apostolic' (in the sense of the Greek word meaning 'sent on mission') team would meet the people, engage them in conversation and in ministry, and look for people who appeared receptive. They would pray for sick people, and for possessed people, and they would counsel people and mediate conflicts... They would engage in some open-air speaking, probably employing parable, story, poetry, song, visual symbols, visual arts and, perhaps, drama to engage the Celtic people's remarkable imaginations... "The apostolic band would probably welcome responsive people into their fellowship to worship with them, pray with them, minister to them, converse with them, and break bread together."<sup>20</sup>

Hunter later explains that inquisitive guests were hospitably welcomed into the monastic community. As they were welcomed, they were allowed to participate in the daily order of worship and work, partnered with a spiritual friend or placed in a small discipleship group. As they engaged in the daily offices with believing members of the community, over time they would come to understand and adopt the faith of their hosts. They could then profess their faith and receive the sacrament of baptism.

One reason the Celtic monastic community was effective was because it reflected the paradigm of belong-behave-believe. Hunter states, "(1) You *first* establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith. (2) Within fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship. (3) In time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them to commit."<sup>21</sup> Following this paradigm, evangelism could take time. While any believer from the community might share the hope he or she had in Christ Jesus at any time during the process, the seeker did not have to immediately convert before being allowed into the community. Conversion took place as the seeker immersed

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<sup>20</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 21-22.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 53.

into the life of the monastic community that welcomed him or her with hospitality, explored the beliefs of the community with freedom, and adopted the faith of the community.<sup>22</sup>

While Hunter's description of the Celtic methods sounds like it took some initiative and determination, he makes the case in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* that these methods are quite compatible with today's ministry context.<sup>23</sup> Like the monastic communities established near ancient Celtic settlements, a small church in a small town is already a spiritual community within the larger town community. Small town churches are often adjacent or even central to the greater community. Proximity to the community in which commerce takes place and citizens interact with each other on a daily basis allows members of the church to brush up against the lost via work, social groups, neighborhoods, schools, and extended family relationships. Could these members be bold enough to offer to pray for the felt needs of those within their sphere of influence? Could they find common ground in hobbies, music, work, and art? Might they be so bold as to invite those within their sphere of influence into the church community with the intention that the church people might extend such welcoming hospitality that their guests might stay for the long term? Could they invite them to belong to the Christian community so that they may participate in the life of the church (behave/become), come to faith in Christ (belief), and grow as Christ's disciples? That is the goal of evangelism.

However, members of small town churches have their own reasons for belonging to a church family, and these reasons are not always informed or

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<sup>22</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 117.

enthusiastic about evangelism. Training must take place. That reveals the importance of discipleship.

### **Discipleship**

Jesus commissioned his followers to make more disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul's ministry throughout Acts and his teaching in the Epistles persuaded people to follow Jesus. If the goal of evangelism in the postmodern context is to invite people to belong to the community of believers or new monastic community, ministries of discipleship involve people in the life of the church and teach them what it means to follow Jesus. As new people are involved in the life of the church through worship, small groups or classes, fellowship, and outreach, they will have opportunities to come to faith in Christ. As Paul's letters to churches in the NT illustrate, those he persuaded learned to follow Jesus in the community. Within the church community, the lost have an opportunity to become disciples.

Therefore, it is vital that the church be prepared to lead people on a path of discipleship. Along the way, seekers can learn about the essentials of Christianity, ask questions, and explore their doubts. As in the Celtic monastic community, they can be a part of the church's study, worship and service, participating alongside other growing disciples. It is a process of active learning. Seekers move from behaving like other Christians in their study, work, and worship to authentic belief. Thus, evangelism and discipleship are tied together, and both can happen within the safe sanctuary of the community of believers. Belonging encircles behaving, which is part of learning how to be a disciple. Ideally, belief emerges through both.

The word used throughout the NT for "disciple" is *μαθητη*. It occurs 269 times in the NT. *μαθητη* means "disciple," "pupil," or "follower." This word is used almost exclusively in the Gospels and Acts, and usually referring to Jesus' pupils and followers, often using the genitive or dative to refer to Jesus' followers as "his disciples." In the Gospels there are a few references to John the Baptist's disciples, and a reference to a lone disciple who appears to be among the crowds following Jesus. Also, there are occasional references to a whole crowd of disciples (Luke 19:37) who were following Jesus. However, the overwhelming majority of occurrences relate to the twelve followers that Jesus chose specifically.

In Acts, Luke uses *μαθητη*, "the disciples" 25 times. Like the other Gospel writers, Luke usually connects the twelve disciples with Jesus. Only once in Acts did Luke refer to disciples as "the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1). Often in Acts, Luke refers to the whole community of people who believe in Jesus and follow his teachings. Dallas Willard states, "The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup>

In modern Christianity, anyone who follows Jesus in order to learn from him and adopt his teaching and lifestyle would be considered Jesus' disciple. Bill Hull defines a disciple as "... a reborn follower of Jesus."<sup>25</sup> There were certain followers whom Jesus specifically picked to be his closest. When referring to disciples today, all those who have professed faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord and who have made a commitment to learn Jesus' teaching and apply it to their lives are disciples of Jesus.

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<sup>24</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), 3.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 32.



Discipline is a related word. "Discipline" is used mostly in the OT. The word refers to "chastisement," "correction," or "punishment." The contexts include God disciplining the people when they stray from following God's commands, and parents disciplining their children in the same manner. This meaning of the word is used in the NT only in Hebrews (4 times in Hebrews 12) and Revelation 3:19. In all of these uses, the word refers to God's corrective measures applied to those whom God loves. A form of the word is used throughout the Bible 52 times.

Discipline has taken on a newer meaning in relation to following Jesus in modern Christian culture. While it still refers to correctional measures, there is another nuance. One may engage in certain disciplines to improve one's way of life. In Christianity, spiritual disciplines are practices in which followers of Jesus regularly engage in order to allow the Holy Spirit to transform shape their lives on a regular basis.<sup>26</sup> As such, spiritual disciplines are means of God's transforming grace for the disciple.<sup>27</sup> There are many such practices, and they include prayer, various methods of Bible reading/study, worship, stewardship, fasting, silence, solitude, and journaling. These disciplines present the church with an order, a rule of life, or a standard of behavior. As members of the church community regularly practice these disciplines, the Holy Spirit can touch their lives, and to transform him or her into the person God desires.

The concept of discipleship implies a combination of "disciple" and "discipline." As followers and learners of Jesus, what corrective measures can we take so that our lives fall in line with the lifestyle that Jesus modeled and taught? A

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<sup>26</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 17.

disciple must have a connection with Jesus, a relationship, even as the twelve disciples whom Jesus hand picked. This relationship involves communication. To engage in communication with Jesus involves two practices: Bible reading (exposing ourselves to God's Word—2 Timothy 3:14-16) and Prayer (talking and listening to God—Matthew 6:5-13). While there are other spiritual disciplines that will help us learn and live what Jesus taught, these two are primary. If people are going to be Jesus' disciples, they must pay attention to their relationship with him. Discipleship is the believer's daily walk with God in which God reveals the ministry and mission to which the believer is called (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Through discipleship, Jesus' followers tap into greater wisdom and experience that inform and empower the evangelistic mission. When speaking to a lost person in the community, how does one know what to say and when to say it? Following a conversion, or at least an invitation into the Christian community, what happens to the respondent? How does a new believer grow into a spiritually mature disciple? The church must intentionally focus on discipleship in order to prepare members to do the work of evangelism, and to introduce inquirers and new believers to solid principles of spiritual growth and development. Following up on the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20), the practice of spiritual disciplines softens the soil in the hearts of the hearers of the proclaimed Word of God (*κερυγμα*). Discipleship helps the heart that has received the seed of the Word to be free of the thorns of life that would choke it out, and breaks up the rocky soil and fallow ground, so that roots can grow deep, and the stalk can bear much fruit. Discipleship invites those who belong to the

community to adopt the behavior of the community (the practice of discipleship), and leads to belief.

Discipleship happens as Jesus' followers live with God each day. As Christians commune with God in prayer, Bible intake, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines, they place themselves before the transforming and sanctifying power of the Spirit. As believers walk with God, they learn from God, and God teaches them how they can best minister in the church as well as engage in the mission to holistically carry the gospel into every context. Jesus followers begin to embody the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), drawing people to God through our actions, attitudes, and words.

And yet discipleship is not merely an individual activity. Discipleship in Scripture can happen when people learn from God directly (Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Paul), but the general pattern is that people learn from a human teacher (Elisha, Jesus & the disciples, the Apostles and the early church, Paul & Timothy). Bill Hull teaches that discipleship happens in community.<sup>28</sup> Disciples must be led and taught, even as Jesus taught the Twelve. In *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman demonstrates that Jesus taught the Twelve in a community setting. Jesus passed on his knowledge through close association with his chosen disciples.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, church leaders must establish association with groups within their churches—groups of those who believe as well as with those who simply belong—in order to produce disciples. Hunter explains this as part of how the Celtic monastic community welcomed seekers and incorporated them into the community life,

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<sup>28</sup> Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 165.

<sup>29</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1963, 1964, 1993), 34.

connecting them into a small group.<sup>30</sup> The application Jesus' methods of discipleship as presented in the Gospels is effective in today's context as well. In a small town like Wyalusing, the spiritual community has already been established. Yet that community must be intentional about making disciples.

### **Community**

A spiritual community is vital for spiritual growth. Discipleship happens in community as individuals who are committed to following Jesus join together to worship, learn, and serve. The spiritual community becomes a classroom in which the principles of discipleship are learned, and the crucible in which these principles are tested. The spiritual community ought to provide a safe place where information can be taught, questions can be asked, and doubts can be expressed. In community, followers of Jesus can support one another, encourage one another, and love one another. As they live together in this community, they may have friction that will test their relationships. Jesus' followers learn to forgive in community. The practical experience of walking with our fellow disciples and loving them even if we are not getting along strengthens us for evangelism and outreach to the greater community that does not know Jesus. Both learning together and living together provide the environment for spiritual growth.

Jesus operated in community. He gathered the Twelve disciples to live together in close association as he taught them how he wanted them to live. As they

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<sup>30</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 48.

followed Jesus, these disciples gained the knowledge and skills that they needed to carry on Jesus' ministry when he left the world.<sup>31</sup>

The Apostles expanded the community of Jesus' followers. It began at the Pentecost celebration in Acts 2 in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles, and they, led by Peter, proclaimed the gospel. 3,000 people became Jesus' followers that day (Acts 2). Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-35 describe the fellowship that this first community of believers enjoyed. They became closely related. They helped on another, shared with those among them who had needs, worshiped and broke bread together. They listened and learned from the Apostles' teaching, and were "one in heart and mind," (Acts 4:32). Their common bond was their growing faith as they became Jesus' disciples.

As the gospel spread through Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria various communities of Jesus' followers arose. The letters of Paul bear witness to this fact, as he wrote to established churches in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae. Members of these various communities (churches) learned and practiced discipleship together. Paul illustrated the community relationships using the metaphor of a body, which he called "The body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:4).

In Acts, Luke narrates that Paul's ministry was to proclaim Christ and start new churches. Wherever he went in the Roman Empire, Paul sought out a spiritual community. Going to the Jews first whenever possible, Paul proclaimed Christ. Some believed, and others violently opposed Paul's teaching. After those in the synagogue who did not believe the gospel tossed him out, Paul went to the non-believing venues. Many Gentiles were ready to receive Christ by faith. Paul

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<sup>31</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

established and organized churches throughout the Empire with those who believed the gospel.

Today, America is salted with churches everywhere. These Christian communities must continue to obey Jesus' words to make disciples. Then the church must send out its members to invite more people into the life of discipleship. As Christians evangelize their cities, towns, and neighborhoods, churches must be prepared to welcome inquirers, include them in practicing the spiritual life of the community, and teach them the principles and practice of discipleship. As their faith emerges and their commitment to Christ deepens, they grow spiritually, and undertake Jesus commission, too. Our churches must engage their members in discipleship training so that they are prepared to give an account of the hope they have in Jesus to anyone who might ask.

### **Revival**

Throughout the Bible as well as church history, the faith and fervor of God's people have waned. Relationships between believers and even with God have grown cold and stale. Discipleship has moved down a person's list of priorities and more urgent pursuits have risen to the top. Sometimes no matter how much a person reads the Bible or prays or engages in Christian service, that person simply lacks enthusiasm about their faith. In some churches, members attend, but they are simply going through the motions. At such times, the church has lost its focus on the Great Commission. In cases like this, God needs to move and to blow a fresh wind into the church.

In the author's experience, this is often the case in small rural churches that are central to small towns. In earlier years, these churches were hubs of community activity. However, as Phyllis Tickle observes, developments in modern technology, endless choices, and more entertaining options have replaced the church in the postmodern context.<sup>32</sup> While these small town churches continue to be supported by significant families in the community, they have ceased to be relevant to the surrounding shifting culture. People simply do not come to the church because there is something going on there. The church needs to be awakened to its role in the story of how God is saving the world. The ends of the earth are at the church's doorstep, but in order to open the door, the church needs revival.

Revival happens when the Holy Spirit breathes new life into believers so that they are re-energized to live a Great Commission lifestyle. Examples of revival occur throughout the Scriptures. In his book, *Revive Us Again*, Walter C. Kaiser analyzes the patterns of revival in the Bible, giving special attention to revivals in the Pentateuch through Judges and especially in 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles. The people followed a cyclical pattern:

1. Faith
2. Falling away into spiritual decline
3. National or natural tragedy
4. Calling out to God
5. Restored faith.

This pattern is illustrated several times in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, but perhaps none so vividly as in the account of revival under King Josiah (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35). After the reign of the wicked king Manasseh, who

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<sup>32</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 86.

established worship of false gods, even building altars in Temple in Jerusalem and participated in child sacrifice (2 Chronicles 33:3-9), Josiah became king. Josiah sought the Lord as a child, and began to rid Judah of idolatry (1 Chronicles 34:3-7). He ordered the repair of the Temple, during which a book of the Law was discovered. After having the book read, Josiah humbled himself, tearing his robes in grief over the nation's forsaking God's Law (34:14-19). Josiah then led a national revival that included a reinstitution of the Passover (35:1ff). God held back judgment on Judah because of Josiah's renewed faithfulness, God sent revival during his reign.

Kaiser believes 2 Chronicles 7:14 is central for the study of revivals.<sup>33</sup> It says, "...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land." Some may consider this a promise for the OT community of Israel. However, the promise is made to "...my people who are called by my name..." With that address in mind, this promise holds true to all people of all times who are belong to God, including Christians—disciples of Jesus who are called by his name. This prescription for the rekindling of faith for God's people involves humility, repentance, and prayer as illustrated in Josiah's story.

After each period of corporate spiritual decline the people endured a period of Divine judgment. When they finally cried out to God for mercy (confession and repentance), God would rescue and revive. They experience renewed zeal for serving the Lord. In a revival, God hears the impassioned prayers of remnants of faithful believers who desire spiritual renewal. In the OT, God sent leaders, judges, prophets,

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<sup>33</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 6.



priests, or kings to lead the people to repent of their sin and return to faith in God.

The books of Judges, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles illustrate these cycles again and again.

Revival in all times and places happens when people who are hungry and thirsty for God engage in impassioned prayer, and are awakened to the reality and depth of their sin in light of God's holiness; when they repent; and when the grace of God through Jesus Christ is renewed in their lives. Then they are brought back to life, spiritually speaking, as they renew their relationship with God.

Churches that have grown stagnant in their evangelism and discipleship need to seek revival. Even churches that welcome new people into their community, but stop there need renewed zeal for discipleship. Inviting people to belong is the easy part. If the church wants to fulfill the Great Commission, intentionally teaching all that Jesus commanded takes more determination and commitment. Therefore, the church needs to be awakened to its mission, and revived in its zeal for evangelism and discipleship.

### **The Supremacy of Christ and the Glory of God**

Underlying all of the components of evangelism, discipleship, and revival are the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ. The church needs to be reminded again and again what the *Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches: “[Humanity’s] chief end is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.”<sup>34</sup> The church’s mission of evangelism and discipleship is not an end. As John Piper points out, the end is worship—more and more people acknowledging the supremacy of

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<sup>34</sup>*The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.] Part 1: The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2002) 7.001, 175.

God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. People glorify God when they obey Jesus' teachings and spread the news of what Jesus accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. As churches reach out to welcome more people into God's kingdom, God is glorified. As the church evangelizes and more people commit to Christ, more people acknowledge his Lordship and gather to worship God. The increase in God's renown and the uplifting of Jesus becomes our motivation for continuing to reach the ends of the earth with the gospel.

Numerous authors have written about the topics of evangelism, discipleship, revival, ancient Celtic evangelistic methods, and the postmodern/post-Christian context within which the church is to fulfill its mission. The following chapter will examine some of the most important works in recent years that inform the church for this task.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Can ancient Celtic Christianity offer some answers to how a rural small town church can effectively engage in discipleship and evangelism? Several writers offer helpful information in three relevant areas. The first area has to do with the context of evangelism and discipleship. Can the story of Christianity's entrance into ancient pre-Christian Celtic culture help the church reach the emerging postmodern/post-Christian culture of the early twenty-first century? The second and third areas are discipleship and evangelism, with significant literature focusing on the evangelistic methods from the Gospels and of later the ancient Celtic monastic communities. Finally, important works about revival provide historical information, theological analysis, and inspiration to the church for continuous renewal that can kindle greater passion to reach such a church's ministry context in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

#### **The New Ministry Context: Postmodern, Pluralistic, Post-Christian**

The ministry context of the church in the West is changing. Even in small rural towns, people view the church, Christianity, and religion differently than just a few decades ago. During a church officer training meeting at the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church (WPC) near the turn of the century, the group struggled find new ways to attract people to the church. One longtime member began to reminisce about a time when the church was the center of activity in the town. "Used to be..." she

began. Very abruptly, another longtime servant of the church cut in, saying, “Used-to-be doesn’t work anymore!” WPC and churches like it continue to struggle with this new ministry context. How does a church like WPC reach out to the community for the sake of Christ in which the church appears less and less relevant? In a culture of postmodernism, WPC is looking for effective ways to welcome people into the church family, and invite them to lives of discipleship.

What is “postmodernism?” Much has been written on this subject. However, Donald Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, helps to summarize this growing and difficult-to-define topic:

... the period since 1970 has witnessed the emergence of what is now generally termed ‘postmodernism,’ a loose label used to define the fragmented package of perceptions and beliefs commonly found among people today. Although challenges to orthodoxy and to dogmatism can be found across the centuries, as well as the challenge to meaning at the heart of modern existentialism, ‘postmodernism’ is said to be characterized primarily by its loss of most of the certainties and absolutes of an earlier age, and particularly those characteristic of pre-1970 scientific ‘modernism.’ The earlier pre-eminence of reason and intellect has been displaced in favor of a greater emphasis on personal feeling and perception; absolute truth is ruled out by relativism; ‘metanarrative,’ the ‘big story’ that explains the meaning of life, is lost in favor of local narratives; and images and stories (predominantly in film) are given a central place in the people’s thought patterns. Postmodernism also contains a strongly romantic component, and is perhaps most readily identified by the innocent romanticism through which it tends to repossess and reformulate the past.<sup>1</sup>

Later, Meek adds other qualities of the postmodernism in what he calls “the faith of the fringe” that have led many seekers to the current interpretation of Celtic Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Along with tolerance, he lists additional characteristics of postmodernism such as a desire for a more primitive way of life (ironic considering

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<sup>1</sup> Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 2000), 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Meek explains throughout the book how many writers on spirituality today have reconstructed Celtic Christianity and its saints to fit the worldview of postmodern spiritual seekers.

the desire to be connected to cyber communities), simplicity, environmentalism, and ecumenism along with tolerance.

Meek would concur with many postmodern Christian writers that the church in the West needs to recognize the postmodern/post-Christian context. He says, "While the secular world began to experiment with its version of religion as an antidote to the pains of postmodernity, the churches themselves, Catholic and Protestant, evangelical and liberal, old and new, faced major challenges."<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson adds, "...I concur that postmodernism, however difficult to define and however disputed the prognostications as to its future, must be taken seriously."<sup>4</sup>

There is a wealth of literature available to guide the church into this new cultural context for evangelism and discipleship. Writers like Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, and the late Mike Yaconelli challenge the thinking of church leaders steeped in modernism. They are among the more popular writers and editors in the emerging church movement. They sometimes provide helpful analysis of cultural changes and practical steps to reaching the postmodern/post-Christian culture.

For example, Kimball is especially helpful with practical information as he shares his own techniques. For example, in *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, Dan Kimball begins with the observation that the church of the middle to late twentieth century is increasingly less relevant. He says, "While many of us have been preparing sermons and keeping busy with the internal affairs of our churches, something alarming has been happening on the outside. What once was a Christian nation with a Judeo-Christian worldview is quickly becoming a

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<sup>3</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 87.

post-Christian, unchurched, unreached nation.”<sup>5</sup> Kimball attempts to offer an approach to worship that is sensitive to postmodern seekers, even though traditional churchgoers might find it distasteful. While Kimball’s primary focus is on worship, he touches on and introduces the context of evangelism and discipleship in contemporary Western culture. His approaches reflect the thinking of other writers struggling to keep Christianity relevant.

However, Kimball and many of his likeminded contemporaries are overly critical of the evangelical church that arose during the modern era. One has a difficult time gleaning information from these writers that does not call for major changes in worship, discipleship, and evangelism, and that is not always practical in a rural small town church. D. A. Carson exposes this hypercritical approach:

Not only are some emerging church leaders, at best, painfully reductionistic about modernism and the confessional Christianity that forged its way through the modernist period. They also, in failing to understand, almost universally give the impression of dismissing this Christianity. They could humbly offer critiques of modernist confessionalism at its best and gratefully acknowledge that many of us are Christians today because our forebears, sustained by grace, were faithful to the gospel. Instead, they tend to gravitate to the worst exemplars and seem to mock them.<sup>6</sup>

Carson makes it clear that contemporary Christianity owes its existence to the church of the modern era. Additionally, he reminds the reader that the church has survived cultural changes before, and that Christianity is not necessarily facing as bleak a picture as Kimball and his colleagues paint.<sup>7</sup>

Two writers that have provided some very helpful information on Christianity and the emerging postmodern culture are Lesslie Newbiggin (*The Gospel in a*

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emergent Church*, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emergent Church*, 84.

*Pluralistic Society and Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*) and Ajith Fernando (*Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths*). Both of these writers deal with some of the more prominent features of the emerging postmodern/post-Christian culture in the West. Both have the advantage of having ministered in Eastern cultures that value religious pluralism, a quality that is increasingly valued in the West as culture shifts away from modernism.<sup>8</sup> Fernando's book is more clearly evangelistic and practical, but both writers offer the church important points in recognizing our biases and properly contextualizing the gospel in the culture emerging in the West.

Though writing at the end of the modern era, Newbigin has a challenging approach for the church in the West to consider. He introduces himself as a missionary in India who has brought a missionary's perspective back home. He says, "This succession of roles has forced me to ask the question I have posed as the theme for this book: What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?"<sup>9</sup> With a slight adjustment to the last phrase from "modern Western culture" to "postmodern," and a view towards contemporary culture, Newbigin offers a very important question for the Western church to consider. How can Christians properly contextualize the gospel in a culture that is further and further removed from the rational thinking of the modern era?

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<sup>8</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel In a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

Further, Newbigin analyzes Western culture at the end of the modern era as it transitions toward postmodernism. In doing so, he identifies many recurring themes of this cultural shift. For example, in the process of identifying the European plausibility structures through which Western Christians have exported the gospel, Newbigin introduces one of those themes: relativism over against absolute truth. He says:

In a consumer society where the freedom of every citizen to express his or her personal preference is taken as fundamental to human happiness—whether this personal preference is in respect to washing powder or sexual behavior—it will be natural to conclude that adherence to the Christian tradition is also simply an expression of personal preference. The implication will be that claims to universal truth are abandoned and that we are back again in a relativistic twilight. The only firmly established truth is the truth of the plausibility structure [which changes from culture to culture and through time], which is bound to deny the Christian's claim that God has acted in historic events to reveal and effect his purpose for all humankind.<sup>10</sup>

Newbigin not only writes in a time of growing relativism and increasingly mind boggling personal choice, but also a time of growing religious pluralism as various world religions filter into Western culture.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, Ajith Fernando says, “Many Christians are living in an environment that is not conducive to maintaining the old belief in the uniqueness of Christ, and many are giving it up.”<sup>12</sup> Fernando brings the perspective of an Eastern Christian who has always ministered in a religiously plural context to the West where such a context has emerged in the last few decades.<sup>13</sup> Fernando provides a practical approach to respectfully sharing the gospel with people of other faiths and philosophies that the

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<sup>10</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 64-65.

<sup>11</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 171ff.

<sup>12</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths*, (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2001), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 18.



Western evangelical Christian might encounter today. Fernando, a native of Sri Lanka, shares his experience of upholding the uniqueness of Christ in a nation that is hostile to such absolute claims.<sup>14</sup> This is something that the church will have to struggle with as it contextualizes the gospel message for postmodern/post-Christian neighbors. He succinctly presents a variety of worldviews, and sensitizes evangelistic Christians as they seek to enter the emerging context for ministry.

Both writers help the church understand the pluralistic society into which the gospel is to be proclaimed. Newbigin explains pluralism in two ways. First, cultural pluralism is "...the attitude which welcomes the variety of different cultures and lifestyles within one society and believes that this is an enrichment of human life."<sup>15</sup> This is a realistic picture of the postmodern West. Along with the influx of these different cultures, the West has adapted to new and different religious views. Newbigin defines religious pluralism: "Religious pluralism, on the other hand, is the belief that differences between the religions are not a matter of truth and falsehood, but of different perceptions of the one truth; that to speak of religious beliefs as true or false is inadmissible."<sup>16</sup> For a church that has drawn strength from modernism's view that objective truth exists, religious pluralism presents a difficulty. Coming back to contextualization, how does one establish the uniqueness of Christ and Christianity's truth claims when religious seekers believe one religion is just as valid as the next?

Is increasing tolerance the answer to this question? Postmodern culture has adapted to cultural and religious pluralism by elevating tolerance as a virtue. Meek

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<sup>14</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love* 26.

<sup>15</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel In a Pluralistic Society*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 14.

states, "Tolerance, leading to the acceptance of a variety of religious groupings, both Christian and non-Christian, is one of the keynotes of the late twentieth century."<sup>17</sup> But where does that leave those who would seek to win others to Christ and uphold Christ's uniqueness? Newbigin points out that the church was born into a context of religious pluralism requiring a certain degree of tolerance, although the consequences of disagreeing with the reigning power were much more dire:

Writers such as those I have quoted often say that this [culture of relativism and pluralism] is a radically new situation which the Church has not faced before, and therefore clearly calls for radically new formulations of the Christian faith. This is clearly not the case. The world into which the first Christians carried the gospel was a religiously plural world and—as the letters of Paul show—in that world of many lords and many gods, Christians had to work out what it means to follow Jesus alone as Lord. The first three centuries of church history were a time of intense life-and-death struggle against the seductive power of syncretism. But if the issue of religious pluralism is not entirely new, it certainly meets our generation in a new way. We must meet it in the terms of our own time.<sup>18</sup>

D. A. Carson adds, "One might have thought that the [pre-modern] world of polytheistic paganism would have had no trouble adding one more religion, this religion that came to be called Christianity. But Christianity was absolutist. It insisted that salvation came exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ, and this struck the pagans as narrow-minded and, well, absolutist."<sup>19</sup> The ancient world, then, was open to various forms of spirituality as long as no one claimed an exclusive path to God. The challenge of the Christian mission was to demonstrate, proclaim and uphold the uniqueness of Christ, and persuade people to come to God by faith in

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<sup>17</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 90.

<sup>18</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 157

<sup>19</sup> Carson, *Becoming Conversant With the Emergent Church*, 91.

Christ alone. It is ironic that this challenge of the pre-modern world has resurfaced in postmodernism.

All of this combines to underscore another postmodern characteristic: spirituality is important. Fernando says that the secular humanism of the modern era "... which generally ignored or denied the spiritual aspect of human beings... has given way to an attitude toward life that gives a higher place to the spiritual. But the spirituality that has attracted people in the West is closer to New Age or Eastern spirituality than it is to Christian spirituality. We see people taking interest in astrology, in magic and the occult, in psychic and spiritual counselors, and in Eastern meditation."<sup>20</sup> To reiterate a key question for the church, while this openness to spirituality creates opportunities for Christians to talk about their faith in Christ, how do Christians *evangelize* in this context? How do Christians fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples if upholding the uniqueness of Christ and his Lordship when such claims will likely be dismissed as absolutist and intolerant? As Fernando states, "Religious pluralism... can be held only by rejecting the Christian claim to possess absolute truth. This claim implies that the gospel has the ultimate truth that all people everywhere need to accept."<sup>21</sup> How do Christians uphold the uniqueness of Christ, help the lost to convert to Christianity, and become followers of Jesus in such a ministry context? Such is the postmodern problem of evangelism and discipleship.

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<sup>20</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 15.

## Some Contemporary Solutions to the Postmodern Problem

Both Fernando and Newbigin offer thoughtful solutions to the postmodern problem. Their solutions flow from their experience living in non-Western religiously pluralistic cultures. Both have wide and deep understandings of the history of modernism. While Newbigin passed away before the turn of the century, his experience provides a good and thoughtful primer for the church in emerging culture. Fernando continues to minister in both Eastern and Western contexts, and provides practical advice for upholding the uniqueness of Christ, contextualization, evangelism and discipleship in light of postmodernism.

Newbigin describes the mission of the church in two ways. "...the Christian world mission is the clue to history in a double sense, which one might characterize as proclaiming and propelling."<sup>22</sup> Describing proclamation, he says, "...by proclaiming Christ the Christian world mission offers to all people the possibility of understanding what God is doing in history."<sup>23</sup> Summarizing Newbigin's more in depth description, Christians offer purpose to the world by witnessing to the truth of the gospel in word, deed, and common life. What they say and what they do prove the futility of worldly social systems, and offer the world a life connected to God and God's purposes. The Christian mission is to proclaim and demonstrate what people are meant to be, and they get there by faith in Christ.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 128.

<sup>23</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 128-129.

<sup>24</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 128-129.

On the other hand, the propelling role of Christian mission "...presses events toward their true end... The coming of the gospel changes the course of events."<sup>25</sup> In other words, the coming of Jesus forces people to reckon with "the question of the meaning and goal of history... [because] the real goal of history has come near in Jesus."<sup>26</sup> When the church lives out the gospel, the church visibly offers the world a community living according to God's purposes, and propelling toward God's goal for humanity. Living this way, the church confronts the systems of power and social structures that form the ministry contexts of the church. While the church will suffer for living faithfully, even that suffering—promised in the NT and modeled by Jesus—serves to confront those in power and those looking on with the reality of God and God's purposes for Creation. People must decide what to do with the gospel presented and proclaimed by the church. This is evangelistic. This is what it means to be a witness. As the gospel spreads through the witness of the church, history is propelled toward the future that God has planned.

One compelling aspect of Newbigin's description of Christian mission is the connection between word and deed. He asks the difficult question of whether the gospel should be preached first, or if social action must be taken against societies injustices in order to lend credibility to the preached gospel.<sup>27</sup> He cites Jesus' word and deeds for an answer. Calling to mind Jesus' (as well as his disciples') acts of power—healings, exorcisms, and miraculous feedings of the hungry—Newbigin says:

On the one hand, the healings—marvelous as they are, do not explain themselves... The works by themselves did not communicate the new fact.

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<sup>25</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 129.

<sup>26</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 130.

<sup>27</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 131.

That had to be stated in plain words: 'The kingdom of God has drawn near.' That means that there is a call for radical decision, for repentance and faith. The healings by themselves, uninterrupted do not make such a demand... On the other hand, the preaching is meaningless without the healing.<sup>28</sup>

Whether or not the church is capable of similar acts of power is not the question here. Instead, the church—local and global, rural and urban—should ask itself whether or not it is the living demonstration of a community impacted by the gospel, which has decided to live for God's purposes as a result of that collision. When a society notices the church living the "new reality" (Newbigin's term) of a gospel-impacted life, they know something of power has happened. When people outside of the church ask what has happened, the door is opened for Christians to proclaim the gospel.<sup>29</sup>

This is significant for the church in postmodern Western culture. While a Christian intent on evangelism may become mired in dialogue regarding perspective, relative truth, absolutism, and spirituality, that Christian's life demonstrates the new reality of which Newbigin speaks—a life impacted for the gospel, and drawing closer to God's purposes. The church within a secular community becomes a whole group of people demonstrating this new gospel-impacted reality. The church becomes salt and light in the midst of a bland and dark world (Matthew 5:13-16). Such a demonstration is compelling to some who will want to know the reason for the hope these Christians have (1 Peter 3:15). While the word is being proclaimed, the deeds lend it credibility (James 2:14-26). Conversely, the word offers an explanation of the new reality being lived out by the church.

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<sup>28</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 132-133.

While Newbigin offers a more philosophical approach to evangelism in a pluralistic society, Fernando offers a more street level approach. Fernando deals more succinctly with topics like the history of modernism and the characteristics of postmodern culture. In light of pluralistic culture, he encourages the paradoxical task of holding together dialogue and persuasion in personal evangelism.<sup>30</sup> While Christians want to persuade others of the uniqueness of Christ and invite them to faith, exercising genuine humility, respect for others, listening to them, and being present when they are in need will create a credible platform from which dialogue and persuasion may take place. "We must be known as lovers of people, just as Jesus was. When our non-Christian neighbors are sick or facing other needs may they see us as genuinely concerned for them... The primary response of Christians to non-Christians is love... We must wisely and clearly oppose the wrong, but we must also clearly express our love for those we oppose."<sup>31</sup> Love and servanthood go a long way toward demonstrating the gospel and so compelling others to find the new reality of which Newbigin writes.

Fernando presents practical information about contextualization. He states, "Contextualization becomes necessary whenever we work with a person of a different culture."<sup>32</sup> Because of their experience with cross-cultural missions, both Fernando and Newbigin encourage sensitivity to language and customs, as well as finding points of contact between Christianity and the foreign culture as a matter for contextualization. A point of contact provides "...a stepping-stone to move into an

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<sup>30</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 56.

exposition of the truth about God.” For Paul in Athens (Acts 17), this was the Athenian altar “to an unknown god.” Such a point of contact may be a felt need for which the Christian may offer help.<sup>33</sup> Newbigin warns that one must be aware of one’s cultural presuppositions, and a distillation of the pure gospel when communicating cross-culturally.<sup>34</sup> Fernando warns that the uniqueness of Christ must be upheld, and that the essentials of the gospel must not be lost, diluting the Christian witness into syncretism.<sup>35</sup> With the changes in Western culture, especially towards religious pluralism, contextualization is necessary whenever the church seeks to proclaim the gospel.

One area in which Newbigin and Fernando diverge is the area of the gospel and other religions. The question of what happens to people who sincerely practice other religions and never have a chance to hear the gospel is a sticky one to address, but one frequently asked in the postmodern culture, even in rural small town churches. If sincerity were enough, why not just leave sincere practitioners of other religions alone? Fernando stands firmly on the witness of Scripture to the uniqueness of Christ, especially as the Apostles proclaimed the gospel to people of other religions throughout Acts.<sup>36</sup> In chapter 14 of *Sharing the Truth in Love*, he cites Romans 1-3 as proof that no one has been left without a witness of God’s existence and revelation. He answers the question regarding those who sincerely worship in other religious thusly:

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<sup>33</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 144ff.

<sup>35</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 211.



In Romans 3:21-31 Paul expounded on God's solution to the problem of universal human sinfulness. He said that God's method of bringing people to a right relationship with Himself is not by their earning it through fulfilling the law (3:21). Instead, "this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (3:22). People must believe in Jesus. That is the only way to salvation.

And why is faith in Christ the only way? Paul answered this question in the next few verses. He first mentioned that all people are hopelessly lost: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We cannot save ourselves by our own efforts; therefore God acted in Christ to give us salvation. "And [we] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (3:24-25). These two verses exude an emphasis on grace. What we could not do for our salvation, God has done for us.

Here we see the flaw in the arguments of those who claim that a person's sincerity and religiousness can be a means of salvation. People are so lost in sin that they are incapable of enough sincerity to merit salvation. The effects of sin upon them and upon their relationship with God are so devastating that they cannot help themselves. Their only hope is the free gift of God's grace through Christ and his word.<sup>37</sup>

Fernando continues by asserting that faith must be exercised in order to receive salvation. This assertion ought to stoke the fires in the church to urgently undertake its evangelistic mission, to go into the world and make disciples.

On the other hand, Newbigin offers a point of view on the question of the gospel and other religions that the church should pay attention to, even if the church pushes away. Newbigin states, "We must look first at the strictly exclusivist view which holds that all who do not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are eternally lost... There are several reasons which make it difficult for me to believe this... And since it is God alone who knows the heart of every person, how are we to judge whether or

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<sup>37</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 214-215.

not a person truly has that faith which is acceptable to him?"<sup>38</sup> Newbigin agrees with Fernando that Christians should not be cloistered away from the world, but get to know and even befriend people of other faiths, exploring commonalities and standing for common causes.<sup>39</sup> However, Newbigin is reluctant to say that those outside of the Christian faith are outside of the possibility of salvation.

Instead, Newbigin strikes a balance between three views on the relation of Christianity to the world's religions: pluralist, exclusivist, or inclusivist. He says:

The position which I have outlined [in chapter 14] is exclusive in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of revelation in Jesus Christ, but it is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects the inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious work of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup>

It is probable that only Newbigin himself may understand this careful balance. Still, the question may be a popular one to consider as people who hold postmodern perspectives come into the church.

The final answer to this question about the gospel and other religions may be one of simple obedience. Newbigin and others who hold on to some form of relativism or religious pluralism say that no one Christian knows whether or not God saves people who sincerely practice other religions. They may point out that only God knows the heart. However, Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Based on the Great Commission and the

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<sup>38</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 173.

<sup>39</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 181

<sup>40</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 182-183.

Apostles' adventures in the religiously pluralistic Roman Empire recorded in Acts, Jesus and his church considered it of utmost importance to persuade people to put their faith in the One and only Savior. Furthermore, Paul devotes the first three chapters of the letter to the Romans to prove that all people are sinners without hope apart from God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Other religious devotion is idolatry (Romans 1:22-23). A culture friendly with religious pluralism may like Newbigin's conclusion, but Paul proclaimed that people cannot believe if they do not hear the gospel preached (Romans 10:14-15). Therefore, in obedience to Scripture, the church should continue this mission of evangelism and discipleship.

### **An Ancient Solution to the Postmodern Problem**

Many of the characteristics of cross-cultural evangelism that Fernando and Newbigin describe provide solutions for evangelism and discipleship in the postmodern context. Additionally, an example of such evangelism from history provides principles that can be applied to Western churches so that their outreach can be more effective. This may be easily adapted to churches in rural small towns. George Hunter goes to great lengths to prove that ancient Celtic evangelists have much to teach the contemporary church. Perhaps the application of the methods they employed will be effective in contemporary culture.

Christians must remember their roots. Fernando encourages the church with an example from the earliest days of evangelism and discipleship:

Paul's ministry is extremely helpful in learning how to relate to people of other faiths [in a religiously pluralistic culture]. His ministry in Athens, recorded in Acts 17:16-34, is particularly instructive. It is a fairly detailed

description of ministry with people whose religious background was completely different than Paul's.<sup>41</sup>

Later, as the Roman Church expanded into pagan Europe, it came into contact with people living by very different cultural and religious worldviews. In *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, Meek, while acknowledging the lack of reliable source material, recounts the missionary efforts of Patrick as he sought to bring Christianity to Ireland.<sup>42</sup> The stories of Patrick, legendary or not, demonstrate that Christians in the past have successfully met and won followers to Christ from a culture that was indifferent or hostile to it. Christianity spread in the religiously plural culture of the NT as well as in pre-Christian Celtic territories. Can the church in postmodern culture adapt earlier church methods to reach people for Christ today?

Hunter attempts to answer these questions in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again*. He introduces the idea of borrowing from the ancient Celtic monastics like Patrick for the purpose of effectively ministering to the postmodern/post-Christian West. Celtic spirituality is popular in current Christian literature, as well as in the great melting pot of postmodern spirituality. However, what makes Hunter's work so poignant is how he draws parallels from the pagan culture (which is premodern) in which Patrick and his disciples introduced the gospel to the resurgence of pagan worldviews in the present day, worldviews that find a home in the openness to spirituality characteristic of postmodernism.

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<sup>41</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 131-133.

In *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Newbigin sees the church exhibiting the kingdom of God, displaying the power of God and confronting worldly cultural establishments, compelling the curious to ask about this. The church seizes the opportunity to point to Christ.<sup>43</sup> The way that Hunter presents the Celtic monastic community at least partially agrees Newbigin's criteria and spreads Christianity. The church as a community is important to both writers. Hunter contrasts the Celtic monastic movement with Eastern monasteries to illustrate this. "What is the difference between Eastern monasteries and Celtic monastic communities? Briefly, the Eastern monasteries organized to protest and escape from the materialism of the Roman world and the corruption of the Church; the Celtic monasteries organized to penetrate the pagan world and to extend the Church."<sup>44</sup> Thus, these monastic communities demonstrated and communicated the gospel to an ancient culture that was indifferent or hostile to Christianity.

To bring this point into the postmodern world, any local church can operate with the mindset of a Celtic monastic community. In many places, even in rural small towns, the church is often centrally positioned and strategically located in an increasingly secular or even a neo-pagan community.<sup>45</sup> Although it may have to re-establish relevance within its ministry context, the local church can reach into the surrounding community to extend the reach of the kingdom of God, both through demonstration as Newbigin stresses, and by welcoming the curious to explore faith in

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<sup>43</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 131-132.

<sup>44</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>45</sup> Hunter establishes a commonality between ancient pagans and "New Barbarians" in the West on pp. 95-98.

Christ.<sup>46</sup> Following the Celtic model, through the common lives of its members, the church can penetrate the surrounding culture, witnessing to the reality of Christ, praying for the felt needs of the community, and welcoming inquirers into the life of the church. Qualities of the ancient Celtic monastic movement like proximity to centers of commerce and trade routes, community-wide hospitality to strangers, and an incarnational presence in the neighboring pagan settlements help to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven to the world. A local church can do likewise with the right frame of mind. Hunter says:

The two most prominent approaches to Celtic evangelization—a monastic community welcoming seekers as guests and teams from the monastic community visiting settlements for weeks or months—might, at first blush, seem unavailable to churches today. None of us live in Celtic monastic communities, and it is not vocationally possible for most of us to relocate in teams for blocks of time. This is a case, however, when the specific model cannot be replicated, but the principles can be applied in new relevant ways.<sup>47</sup>

Hunter explains these principles. Through the Celtic monastic presence in pagan communities, Christians reached out and interacted with their neighbors. These neighbors were free to inquire of the monastic community. Hunter outlines the way seekers were introduced into the monastic community. He highlights the hospitality with which any seeker that entered was welcomed.<sup>48</sup> Belonging is vital for the seeker, even before he or she is capable of making a faith commitment. The life and work of the community serve to draw the Celtic inquirer along towards the path of a faith journey with the goal of commitment to Christ and the church.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

<sup>47</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 117.

<sup>48</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 53.

The church in the rural small town is situated as just such a community. Members of the church in such a context are likely to have pre-existing relationships with all sorts of people outside of the church community. These members are strategically located in neighborhoods, factories, farms, and schools to have an outreach to people who need to know Christ. Like the ancient Celtic monastics, the walls of small town churches need not become a barrier to keep the world outside. Through these churches, followers of Christ can reach out to invite inquirers, seekers, and lost souls inside where they can pour out hospitality as the discipleship exercise begins.

Through the local church as viewed as a heaven-exhibiting and welcoming community, an invitation to discipleship may be extended. The lost can be found. The faith of the community can be taught and caught. People can move from outside of the church family to belonging to the church family, behaving like the church family (through discipleship), and believing (committing to faith in Jesus Christ). People can grow to recognize the supremacy of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Such an approach to evangelism leading to discipleship may not be very confrontational, but if undertaken intentionally by churches, may transform communities for God's kingdom even in a postmodern context.

## Celtic Sources

Both Meek and Hunter acknowledge that Celtic spirituality and Celtic Christianity have become very popular during the end of the last century and beginning of the new millennium. Postmodern spirituality seems to have a niche for the saints of Celtic Christianity.<sup>50</sup> Many writers have undertaken to explain, express, and adopt what they believe is a more authentic and less encumbered version of Christianity than what grew from Rome or came out of the Protestant Reformation. Writers like Ian Bradley, Esther De Waal, J. Philip Newel, and even evangelicals like Calvin Miller attempt to build a connection with ancient Celtic Christians to benefit and bless spiritual minded people in postmodern culture. Ancient holy places like Iona (from which Columba is believed launched Christianity into Scotland) and the Holy Isle of Lindisfarne (established by Columba's disciple, Aidan, to bring Christianity to northern England) are now popular places for pilgrimages. There are spiritual communities on both of these islands as well as at Northumbria and in the US devoted to living by Celtic Christian patterns of life.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not these writers and communities are connected with authentic ancient Celtic Christianity is a subject for debate. Meek's book is scathingly critical of the contemporary Celtic Christian movement. Nevertheless, Celtic spirituality is popular in the current postmodern context.

In *The Quest For Celtic Christianity*, Meek critically analyzes the Celtic spirituality movement. He demonstrates how the popularity of "Celtic Christianity"

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<sup>50</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> These ancient-style communities ironically have a presence on the World Wide Web: the Iona Community ([www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk)); the Community of Aidan and Hilda on Lindisfarne ([www.aidanandhilda.org.uk](http://www.aidanandhilda.org.uk)); the Northumbria Community in northern England and several other European countries as well as the US and Canada ([www.northumbriacommunity.org](http://www.northumbriacommunity.org)).



as presented by contemporary writers and practitioners is appealing to so many people in the emerging postmodern era, and yet is not founded on genuine ancient Celtic Christian source material. Postmodern values such as environmentalism, ecumenism, tolerance, simplicity, and a “fringe” mentality resonate with people today.<sup>52</sup> Regarding Celtic theology, Meek says, “The frames of reference which are used to define ‘Celtic Christianity’ are largely external to the proper Celtic community of faith... This process no doubt helps to validate ‘Celtic Christianity’ in a global perspective, but it also raised the suspicion that the ‘Celts’ are being used to further particular agendas, and even to inject subtle doses of (generally) liberal theology into the popular spiritual mainstream.”<sup>53</sup> Throughout his book, Meek reminds the reader that the ancient Celtic Christians are left without a witness. There are few available Celtic sources that explain genuine ancient Celtic Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, Celtic Christian theology is not necessarily evangelical, nor is it necessarily authentic. Donald E. Meek charges that savvy marketers are currently exploiting the terms “Celtic,” “Celtic spirituality,” and even “Celtic Christianity” simply to make money on a current fad, building on its popular contemporary spiritual themes. For example, Meek refers to a book entitled *Celtic Daily Prayer: A Northumbrian Office*:

... compiled by Andy Raine and John T. Skinner (1994). Its green cover carries a golden representation of a ‘Celtic’ cross-head. This book, however, is a concoction of excerpts from a wide variety of writers and compilers, few of whom have any ‘Celtic’ connections...<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, ch. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 94.

<sup>54</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 95

<sup>55</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 11.

Meek goes on to say about the volume:

The book bears as close a relationship to genuine Celtic tradition (as defined in terms of language and culture) as sand does to moon-dust; the use of the word 'Celtic' here seems to denote no more than a haggis of citations which defy definition by any other designation. Yet, in some quarters, it is nevertheless acceptable—and evidently profitable—to slap the term 'Celtic' on hybrid compilations of the kind, and to present them to the unknowing public.<sup>56</sup>

Meek is obviously skeptical about what is currently called, "Celtic Christianity."

There may be value in modern writing about ancient Celtic Christianity for personal spiritual growth, but evangelicals must proceed with caution. Aside from Meek's well-founded criticism of the current movement's authenticity, there are troubling theological concerns to be weighed. For example, J. Philip Newell begins his book, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* with a prelude stating that he "... will be drawing on material that ranges from the earliest centuries after Christ through to today. Some of these sources historically have been hidden or lost sight of, such as *The Acts of John* and *The Secret Book of John*."<sup>57</sup> He also draws from such apocryphal works as *The Gospel of Thomas*, as if there is some secret wisdom hidden within that supersedes the Bible. Thus, non-canonical and non-authoritative sources inform Newell's theology. So informed, he calls his readers back to the image of God in which they were created, but which they have forgotten with the anxieties of the world beyond the Fall in Genesis 3.<sup>58</sup> While this merely hints at ancient heresy, Newell travels a dangerous road away from orthodoxy. He frequently

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<sup>56</sup> Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> J. Philip Newell, *Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xi.

<sup>58</sup> Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, 4ff.

and openly appeals to Pelagius and opposes Augustinian theology.<sup>59</sup> Further, Newell appeals to perspectives that could be called Universalist, while prefacing his appeal for world peace through the love of Christ. He says, "All the great spiritual traditions of humanity have pointed in their distinct ways to the Oneness from which we come and the Oneness that we long for. The Celtic tradition has done this through the love of Christ."<sup>60</sup> While explorers of cafeteria-style postmodern 'spirituality' might find such appeals to secret wisdom in the guise of Celtic Christianity intriguing, this ought to be somewhat unsettling to evangelical readers.

Hunter, on the other hand, is more concerned with analyzing the rapid spread of Celtic Christianity in ancient times. Historical information about Patrick, Columba, Aidan, and others provides a basis for Hunter's ideas. As discussed above, he encourages churches to adapt the successes of these ancient Celtic Christians to effectively expand God's kingdom. He says, "The mainline Western Churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, lack both the precedent and the 'paradigm' for engaging the West's emerging mission fields. There is, however, a model upon which Western Christians can draw as they face this daunting new situation. The ancient movement known as Celtic Christianity can show us some ways forward in the twenty-first century."<sup>61</sup> If Hunter's approach is applied to the local church, it may revitalize the church's impact to the surrounding community.

All this is to say that one can be caught up in the hype of any movement, Celtic Christianity notwithstanding. The principles any church applies must be

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<sup>59</sup> This appeal is a major theme throughout *Christ of the Celts* as well as *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997). Newell's writing provides superb material for Meek's criticisms, and should be read with care.

<sup>60</sup> Newell, *Christ of the Celts*, x.

<sup>61</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 8-9.

adapted to its unique ministry context and to the church family's personality.

However, the church can look back at this ancient historical movement for parallels to postmodern culture as well as adaptable and applicable principles for evangelism and discipleship.

### **Contemporary Evangelism Based on Celtic Models**

There are several basic sources that inform the church on evangelism and discipleship. The sources reviewed present principles that can be utilized along with Hunter's principles of Celtic evangelism. Among the many, Robert E. Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism* is one of the best on preparing small groups of believers to multiply their faith and bring people to Christ. Donald S. Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* is helpful regarding the content of discipleship. Ajith Fernando's *Sharing the Truth In Love*, cited above, instructs the reader in how to sensitively share our faith and uphold the uniqueness of Christ in the context of contemporary postmodern culture.

Hunter's book provides valuable information about evangelism and discipleship from ancient times that can be adapted by today's Western churches. For instance, he explains that Celtic monastic communities were located for accessibility. In contrast to Eastern monasteries that were very secluded he says, "...the Celtic Christians built their monastic communities in locations accessible to traffic of the time, like proximity to settlements, or on hilltops, or on islands near the established sea lanes."<sup>62</sup> This calls for churches of today to consider their location. What is

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<sup>62</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 28.

going on in the neighborhood? Where can members make contact with people outside of the church—at work? at school? at the coffee shop? elsewhere? Many small town churches are located centrally in their towns, making an ideal strategic location from which to launch an evangelistic mission.

For another example, Hunter stresses the emphasis on hospitality within the Celtic monastic communities. Hunter expresses that it was very important to these communities to give a sense of belonging to any who entered the gates. He explains how the community placed a high emphasis on “... the role of the monastic community’s hospitality in ministry with seekers, inquirers, refugees, and other ‘guests.’”<sup>63</sup> Once such a person enters the monastic (or church) community, whether through invitation or curiosity, they “... would meet a ‘porter’ stationed near the monastic community’s entrance, whose chief role is to welcome guests and introduce them to the rest of the community. The abbot, and everyone else, would welcome [that person] with ‘all courtesy of love.’”<sup>64</sup> Other expressions of welcome and hospitality would follow, including a foot-washing by the abbot and a meal with the abbot of the community. Such hospitality was the highest commitment of the monastic community.<sup>65</sup> Thus, wherever one comes from and whatever one’s agenda might be, following the Celtic model, strangers would be made to feel as if they already belonged to the community.

Adapting and applying these and other principles that Hunter illuminates, any local church can operate as a monastic community that has already established itself

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<sup>63</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

in an increasingly secular or even a neo-pagan culture. Although it may have to re-establish relevance within its ministry context, the local church can reach into the surrounding community to extend the reach of the kingdom of God.

A basic approach to evangelism comes from Robert E. Coleman's *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Coleman presents a model that may fit well within the Celtic monastic format. Based on the relationship Jesus had with his disciples, this model begins with the selection of a small group of disciples from within a larger community. Just as Jesus chose the Twelve from amongst his growing number of followers, so the church can form small groups of disciples led by a more mature believer.<sup>66</sup> Coleman states a fundamental principle of teaching: "that other things being equal, the more concentrated the size of the group, being taught, the greater the opportunity for effective instruction."<sup>67</sup> Coleman's main concern is not simply to build small groups of Christians within the church who care for and nurture one another forever and ever. This may often happen in churches of any size and shape. Coleman sees Jesus' goal as evangelism—proclaiming the gospel in order to win followers to faith in Christ. He says:

Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world. Thus his ministry in the Spirit would be duplicated manifold by his ministry in the lives of his disciples. Through them and others like them it would continue to expand in an ever-enlarging circumference until the multitudes might know in a similar way the opportunity which they had known with the Master. By this strategy the conquest of the world was only a matter of time and their faithfulness to his plan.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1963, 1964, 1993), 24.

<sup>67</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 89.

This is an important reminder that all aspects of discipleship do not end with the movement from belonging to belief, but go beyond belief to reproduction.

Interestingly, the twelve disciples Jesus selected did not fully understand Jesus as their Savior and Lord while they followed him. Their understanding grew during the three years that Jesus lived with and taught them. Initially, they knew him as their Teacher. However, in this small group context, through the process Coleman describes, Jesus imparted his wisdom and revealed his identity in word and deed. He prepared these men to carry on his work of bringing the kingdom of God to the world. Coleman says, "The initial objective of Jesus' plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father."<sup>69</sup>

Can the Master plan work within the framework of Celtic monastic evangelism? It appears so. Hunter points out that a major theme of Celtic monastic outreach, "... focuses on how the monastic community prepared people to live with depth, compassion, and power in mission."<sup>70</sup> He adds:

If the monastic community was at all large, you spent time with a small group of ten or fewer people led by someone chosen primarily for their devotion... You participated in the common life, meals, work, learning, biblical recitation, prayers, and worship of the whole monastic community... Through your small group, and the community's life, and perhaps as a soul friend, you observed and gained experience in ministry and witness to pre-Christian people.<sup>71</sup>

This seems to fit well with Coleman's observations of Jesus' principles of teaching his small discipleship group. Coleman observes that Jesus taught his disciples simply by association, by spending time in close proximity with them. He says, "Amazing as

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<sup>69</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 48.

it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men his way was to draw them close to himself.”<sup>72</sup>

Likewise, Ajith Fernando’s *Sharing the Truth in Love* is helpful in considering how to adapt the principles of Celtic evangelism to contemporary local churches. Hunter tells how Aidan and his missionaries—commissioned from Iona, settling on Lindisfarne—set out to reach a very different group of people that the Celtic evangelists had not yet encountered, namely the Anglo-Saxons of northern England. He says, “They multiplied monastic communities... they sent apostolic teams from monastic communities to reach settlements within the region;” and quoting John Finney, “In the Celtic Christian movement, ‘the bishops... were above all the leaders of evangelistic missions into the surrounding countryside and to the local secular leadership.’ The team would engage in sustained group visits to settlements where they would minister with people, interpret the gospel in indigenous ways, and plant churches.”<sup>73</sup> The purpose of Fernando’s writing is to prepare Christians to share their faith in a pluralistic society while maintaining a belief in the uniqueness of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

### Discipleship

Once a person is welcomed into the church family, once they are made to feel that they belong, how do they move toward belief—a commitment to Christ—and later to becoming a multiplying Christian? What happens in the small groups of disciples that grows a person’s faith? In this area of discipleship, there are many

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<sup>72</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 37-37 quoting John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd Ltd., 1996), 55.

<sup>74</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, 15.



helpful writers. Richard Foster and Dallas Willard are two examples at the top of their field. However, Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* provides a very practical presentation of classic spiritual disciplines that may be more easily understood and implemented within the church. Whitney offers a brief definition, "The Spiritual Disciplines are those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times."<sup>75</sup> Learning to practice these disciplines is what brings a person closer to God.

Whitney presents a good list and explanation of twelve spiritual disciplines that small groups or individuals can practice. Whitney's list includes prayer, Bible "intake" (hearing, reading, and studying God's Word as well as memorizing and meditating on Scripture), worship, evangelism, service, stewardship of resources, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning. Whitney encourages these disciplines to be practiced in fellowship rather than isolation.<sup>76</sup> The practice of spiritual disciplines not only strengthens the whole church, but in a small group can build relationships that can help those newly welcomed into the church move from behaving like Christians to true commitment to Christ. Whitney makes a personal claim: "In my own pastoral and personal Christian experience, I can say that I've never known a man or woman who came to spiritual maturity except through discipline. Godliness comes through discipline."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 15.

<sup>76</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 15.

Furthermore, these spiritual disciplines fit within the model of Celtic evangelism. Spiritual disciplines provide content for discipleship. In other words, it is what these small groups can do in order to cultivate spiritual maturity and produce multiplying Christians. For instance Whitney's "Bible intake," encompassing listening to, reading, and studying Scripture can be done in small groups like the ones Hunter describes in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. Even more personal forms of Bible intake such as memorization and meditation can benefit from the accountability of a soul friend or small group. Prayer, worship, service, and learning (study of Christian resources) can take place with soul friends or in groups within the church family.

The challenge is for churches to be intentional and instructive about facilitating spiritual disciplines as a small group exercise for the purpose of spiritual maturity. Informed by the Gospels, Whitney makes the claim, "...to be a disciple of Jesus means, at the very least, to learn from and follow him. Learning and following involve discipline, for those who only learn accidentally and follow incidentally are not true disciples."<sup>78</sup> Based on Whitney's statement, the church had better be intentional about facilitating spiritual growth through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Thankfully, Whitney provides content to help the church in this important area of discipleship.

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<sup>78</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 18.

## Revival

Revival is at the heart of transforming the church. While some practical steps can be taken as well, like those laid out in Kevin Fords *Transforming Church*, a spiritual change needs to happen first. Two authors that provide background and principles for such change are Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (*Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual*) and Richard F. Lovelace (*Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*). Kaiser's book traces patterns of revival throughout the Bible, especially the OT. Lovelace examines renewal movements and revivals throughout history, and provides the church with a challenge to seek continuous renewal. In doing so, the church will remain fervent in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Revival is when the Holy Spirit breathes new life into believers. Consequently, believers are re-energized to live a life faithful to God, recognizing God's supremacy and (since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2) submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and often rekindling fervor for living a life of discipleship and service. During revival, Jesus' followers renew their passion for following Christ, and their commitments to the continuing mission of fulfilling the Great Commission.

There are many historical and contemporary books dealing with revival. From the writings of Jonathan Edwards during the Great Awakening in early America to Charles Finney's *Lectures on the Revival of Religion* (Alethia In Heart, 2005) at the time of the Second Great Awakening, there are many first hand historical works to consult. Keith J. Hardman (*Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in*

*America*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) provides a survey of revivals, awakenings, and renewal movements in the U.S. from the time of the Puritans through the middle of the twentieth century. Likewise, the work of the Billy Graham Association and Luis Palau provide information on more modern evangelistic and revival movements.

However, Richard Lovelace and Walter C. Kaiser provide the best resource material for this project. Both provide information about revivals throughout history. In *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal*, Kaiser focuses revival and renewal in the Bible, especially the OT. In *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: an Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, Lovelace analyzes patterns of revival and renewal movements in the Bible, as well as in post-Biblical history. Both authors identify patterns common to revival and renewal movements. These patterns provide groundwork and inspiration for pursuing continuous renewal movements and revival for the church in any age and setting. Evangelism and discipleship that incorporate the Celtic monastic model may utilize and be inspired by the Biblical and historical pattern identified by Lovelace and Kaiser. Their work has been very helpful.

Kaiser and Lovelace, along with Robert Coleman identify this pattern in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. Lovelace calls this "cyclical renewal". He writes, "Under the Old Covenant the cyclical pattern of apostasy and spiritual renewal is one of the most obvious characteristics of the people of God. The faith of the masses and their leaders perpetually waxed and waned, while the vitality of the godly remnant ran through biblical history like a burning fuse, periodically igniting the surrounding mass in brief periods of reformation."<sup>79</sup> Coleman provides a brief

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<sup>79</sup> Richard F. Lovelace *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 61.

overview of these cyclical patterns of revival in chapter three of *The Coming World Revival*. Coleman touches on the three-hundred-year period of rule by judges in the OT. He says of this period, "...[it] shows the Israelites again and again forsaking the Lord and serving other gods. Judgment inevitably follows. Then after long years of oppression, the people repent and cry to God for help."<sup>80</sup> Kaiser's book *Revive Us Again* focuses specifically on many of the revivals in the Old Testament, but he especially brings out the important revivals of 2 Chronicles. The cyclical pattern is at work there, with the peoples' faith waxing and waning based on the king's religious activity and the ministry of various prophets. Here is a summary of the Biblical pattern of revival these authors identify:

1. A period of *spiritual decline* with an increase in idolatry, apostasy, or complacency toward proper worship of God.
2. *God's judgment* comes in various forms. In the Old Testament, this meant enemy attacks (as in Judges 2:14-16 and 2 Kings 25), or some natural disaster (as with Elijah and the drought in 1 Kings 17 and 18).
3. *Awakening*: God's judgment brings people to a realization of God's holiness and power. Also, they are struck with the depth of their sinfulness and cry out to God for rescue (Lovelace refers to these two events as the "preconditions of renewal").<sup>81</sup>
4. God sends a *charismatic leader* to call them back to a right relationship with God and right worship of God.
5. The people *repent* of their erroneous ways:
  - The people humbling themselves before God.
  - Next they confess their sin against God.
  - They turn from idolatry, and may destroy their idols and places of pagan worship.
  - They turn to God in an appeal for mercy and renewed faith.
6. God graciously sends *the Holy Spirit* in and through this leader to strengthen the people, empower them to defeat their enemies, reverse the natural disaster that has occurred, and breathe new spiritual life into the people.
7. The people *follow God faithfully*, at least for a generation, make up for social injustices, and practice proper observance of God's law and the sacrificial system.

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<sup>80</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Coming world Revival* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1995), 61.

<sup>81</sup> Lovelace illustrates the preconditions of renewal along with the primary and secondary elements of renewal in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* in the table on p. 75, with analysis in the chapters that follow.

8. Unfortunately, successive generations fail to live up to the revival generation and fall into idolatry practiced by neighboring peoples. They blend the worship of Yahweh with worship of foreign gods and practices that Yahweh judges as “detestable” (2 Kings 21:1-2).

Like the Biblical pattern of cyclical renewal, revivals in post-Biblical history follow this pattern of periods of spiritual drought, awakening, and renewed commitment to discipleship. Lovelace traces renewal movements from the Montanists of the second century to the precursors the Reformation, the Puritans and Pietists, the Great Awakening and Second Great Awakening, to the revival preachers of the twentieth century and into the Jesus Movement of the 1970's.<sup>82</sup> In tracing these renewal movements along with surveying Biblical renewal and revivals, Lovelace identifies the theological underpinnings of spiritual renewal. He outlines these theological points in posing the preconditions of renewal: a new awareness of God's holiness and our own sinfulness. Next he discusses the primary elements of renewal: justification, sanctification, the indwelling Spirit, and (surprisingly) authority in spiritual conflict. Finally, he gives us the secondary elements of renewal: mission through evangelism and social demonstration, prayer, community, disenculturation, and theological integration. This observation provides greater inspiration to seek effective ways to pray for renewal and seek culturally relevant ways to evangelize, and engage all who are drawn to church in pathways of discipleship.

Of additional importance for contemporary revival, Lovelace offers a thorough critique of the contemporary local church that is fitting for the times. While his critique is dated, describing the church in the U.S. in the 1970s, Lovelace does

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<sup>82</sup> Lovelace traces these renewal movements through *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, chapter 1: “Jonathan Edwards and the Jesus Movement,” especially from pp. 32-54.

touch upon the situation in the West is facing that Newbiggin, Fernando, and Meek describe in their writing, namely pluralism.<sup>83</sup> He says, "But there are many other pressures towards change. Chief among them is the radical pluralism, which, as the futurologists have told us, is emerging as the twentieth century moves onward. So many subcultures are proliferating that Christian lay people almost need disenculturation to preserve their sanity."<sup>84</sup> He goes on to say, "In order to cope with this catastrophically shifting environment, the Christian needs to be very deeply rooted in the cross of Christ."<sup>85</sup> Lovelace provides a general solution for local congregations, while humbly suggesting that each congregation has its own unique set of challenges. Thus, Lovelace's call for revival and renewal along with his analysis of Biblical and historical renewal movements remain poignant for the contemporary church regardless of the setting.

It follows that any revival or renewal movement needs depth in order to scratch beneath superficiality. That is where discipleship comes in. It is one thing to get new people into the church, even if they feel that they belong to the church community. It is another to engage them in continuous renewal in their spiritual lives as they grow in discipleship. This remains a challenge for the church beyond the desire for revival.

Still, following the pattern described by Lovelace and Kaiser from the Bible and from history, it seems appropriate for the church to continually pray for revival. For the church and culture to recognize the supremacy of God and the Lordship of

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<sup>83</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 203.

<sup>84</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 207.

<sup>85</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 207-208.

Jesus Christ, the church needs to intercede on behalf of its surrounding community, and ask for awakening, renewal, and revival.

### **Conclusion**

Revival coupled with evangelistic outreach and discipleship can lead to spiritual maturity for individual Christians as well as for churches. This is the challenge of the authors cited. These important works lead this author to the conclusion that contextualizing the gospel message within the larger and increasingly pluralistic community, a readiness to share the reason for the hope we have in Christ, a willingness to invite people to into the church community even before they convert to Christianity, and an intentional program of discipleship can fuel a deep and lasting renewal movement. Prayer for revival—for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit to rekindle passion for fulfilling the Great Commission—is an essential component for this renewal. It is necessary for a rural small town church like WPC as well as for the church in any context.

How has this information helped WPC in its local outreach, evangelism, and discipleship? Can the Celtic monastic model provide an adaptable pattern for practical evangelism and discipleship? The following chapters will describe a multi-phased project that demonstrates both intentional and unintended results for WPC and larger ministry contexts. The project is based on utilizing the principles of Celtic evangelism primarily described by Hunter in order to renew fervor for evangelism and discipleship.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE THESIS-PROJECT

#### **Introduction**

Based on the Biblical and theological foundations laid previously, and utilizing the literature on hand, the thesis project was designed to transform the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church (WPC) into an outpost of God's kingdom in which people can grow as Jesus' disciples. The desired results would answer these questions: Can a church in a rural small town apply strategies of evangelism and discipleship demonstrated in the ancient Celtic monastic movement to reach the lost today? Can such a church begin to view itself as a version of a contemporary monastic community that exhibits the kingdom of heaven and welcomes critics, seekers, and refugees whom they will engage in discipleship?

The thesis project that explores these questions initially took on three phases. The first phase focused on the Celtic evangelistic characteristic of strategic location. Church members responded to interview questions that revealed their awareness of their active witness in the larger community surrounding the church. The second phase was a congregation-wide survey called "the Transforming Church Index." The survey revealed the prominent character traits of WPC, revealing the church family's strengths. Some of those strengths are directly compatible with those of Celtic monastic communities that allowed them to successfully attract and disciple outsiders in ancient times. The third phase was a small group that explored and practiced eight characteristics of Celtic evangelism and discipleship gleaned from Hunter's *The Way*

of *Celtic Evangelism* that are most likely to transfer to the postmodern ministry context in which WPC is situated. All three projects revealed much about this small town church—some great accomplishments, and some opportunities for growth.

### **Interviews: Strategically Located for Transformation**

George Hunter describes how the Celtic evangelists took advantage of strategic location. Patrick and his team, as well as those who came after him and carried on his work, established their monastic communities in the vicinity of existing Celtic native settlements, and in important places that were usually accessible to outsiders.<sup>1</sup> Although enclosed, these monastic communities were open to visits from their pagan neighbors.<sup>2</sup> As members of the monastic communities interacted with their neighbors, they adopted a missional attitude, they would interact with their neighbors from nearby settlements, “...minister with the people, interpret the gospel in indigenous ways, and plant churches.”<sup>3</sup> If one of the neighbors would come to visit the monastic community, they would be received with the utmost hospitality. Then they could be incorporated into the community, and engaged in ongoing discipleship.<sup>4</sup> All of this started with strategic location and interaction on behalf of the monastic community.

Strategic location involves making the most of where followers of Jesus are so that at when the opportunity arises, they may, “...always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks [them] to give a reason for the hope that [they] have,”

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<sup>1</sup> George G. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 29.

<sup>3</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 38.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 52.

(1 Peter 3:15). Evangelist Ron Hutchcraft says, "Postmodern, post-Christian (or pre-Christian) people will have to be reached where they are. You already are where they are: in your neighborhood, at your school, at your workplace, in your personal universe."<sup>5</sup> This speaks to each disciple's position in the community or at work. In a small town, it may involve the same people in a variety of settings, from work to social settings to school functions, and more. Like the Celtic monastics, followers of Jesus in a small town must make use of their strategic locations in the larger community to help make more disciples.

In a small town, the church is often in a strategic location. In Wyalusing, the Presbyterian Church is in the middle of the town. It is accessible by foot from many residents within the borough limits. Various community groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and the Boy Scouts utilize the facilities for their meetings. This location is even better than those of Patrick's day because the church already exists within the town borders. No new church needs to be planted there at this time. In the past, the church was central to the social life of the Wyalusing community. Secularization has taken place over the last forty years, and those days are gone.<sup>6</sup> However, because of its location, WPC is poised to make the kind of impact that the ancient Celtic monastic community made in its time.

Not only is WPC strategically located, members are in important places throughout the community. Many of the community's lost people are easily within their spheres of influence. Some members are employed as teachers and aids in the

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<sup>5</sup> Ron Hutchcraft, *A Life That Matters*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007) p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 86.

local school system. Other members work in the school administration office. There is even a member on the school board. There are members who own local shops and funeral homes. Some work in nearby large factories that employ many residents with various worldviews and spiritual attitudes. Retired people from WPC frequent the local restaurants and cafes for coffee with other locals. Many members belong to civic organizations in the area. These members are all in strategic spots that could be advantageous for the evangelistic mission of the church. However, they must become aware and take advantage of their strategic location by looking for points of contact with those who are within their sphere of influence. For the members of WPC, making disciples of all nations can begin by making disciples from among people within the immediate vicinity of their daily living.

The following is information gathered from interviews with various WPC members who are strategically located in the larger community. The interviews happened in the fall of 2008.<sup>7</sup> The format was informal and conversational. Each member interviewed was asked to describe how he or she might utilize his or her strategic location to impact the community for the kingdom of God. Some understood their position to be divinely appointed. Others had never considered how their faith in God might influence their work in the community or how God might utilize them for the growth of God's kingdom.

Jane is a special education teacher in one of the local elementary schools. Her interview was given in her classroom after school in November of 2008. Jane grew up at WPC, went to college for education, stayed strong in her faith while in college,

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<sup>7</sup> All interviews were confidential; the names of interviewees have been changed by mutual agreement).

and she is now starting her family back in Wyalusing. Jane believes her job provides an opportunity to minister to the children in her class. Jane says many of the boys and girls come from homes where they do not get much love. Their parents treat them as if they will never amount to much when they grow up. Jane sees it as her ministry to love these students, and to help them realize that they can learn. For her, each of them has potential.<sup>8</sup> Jane is an evangelical Christian in a public school system, so she has to be careful not to jeopardize her career by overstepping her bounds. Does she realize the strategic location she is in? She does pray for her students? Perhaps it will only be a matter of time until she has an opportunity to tell one of her students or one of their parents about Christ.

Cindy is the owner of the local coffee shop. Her interview took place at the coffee shop in November 2008. Cindy is an elder at WPC, and is a strong evangelical Christian. She and her sister (also a Christian) opened the coffee shop about a decade ago. The coffee shop has provided a good space for building relationships with people of various backgrounds in the community and opening conversations for evangelism. The shop has a steady customer base as well as travelers who stop in from for lunch or a snack in a warm, friendly environment. There are some regular customers that Cindy has targeted over the years for evangelistic conversations. Cindy is never pushy about her faith, but she is always open to talk to someone about coming to Christ or church involvement. From time to time, Cindy has hired people who need to be exposed to the love of Christ. During the summers Cindy has employed high school and college students whom she feels need exposure to a positive Christian role model. Cindy is a good boss. She treats her employees fairly

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<sup>8</sup> "Jane," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November, 2008.

and has good relationships with them. She cares for the people who work for her. There have been people that she specifically hired because they needed to experience Christian love, if not verbally at least through Cindy's actions.<sup>9</sup> By building relationships with her employees and customers, Cindy has been effective at influencing people positively for Christ. While these results may not be quantifiable, it is clear that Cindy is a person who has made good use of the strategic location in which God has placed her.

Angela is a school nurse for the neighboring school district. Her interview took place over the phone in November of 2008. She is very active in the life of the church. She has worked in the school system for a long time. She recently commented that she is past the point of worrying about political correctness in relating to her students, and is much more open about her Christian faith.<sup>10</sup> WPC has one family that has come to church for whom Angela was a key contact person. Angela worked with the children of that family through the school system, and had a positive impact for the Lord. Her lifestyle helped to bring the members into the church family.

Wanda is one of three members of WPC who works in the public school administration office. Her interview was given in November 2008 at Cindy's coffee shop, near her office. She had not thought of her job so much as an opportunity for Christian outreach or evangelism. Actually, she pointed out that nearly everyone in the administration office is a Christian, and all are active in local churches. The interview made her think differently about her relationships with her coworkers.

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<sup>9</sup> "Cindy," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> "Angela," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November 2008.

Wanda commented on how forward some of them are when it comes to their Christian identity.<sup>11</sup> Wanda is a very thoughtful person. Perhaps the interview combined with the long-term strategy of preaching and teaching with an emphasis on evangelism will open her eyes to her strategic location and the potential she has to pray for revival and awakening in the school system.

Margaret owns a local beauty salon in town. Margaret believes her main job behind her ownership of the business is to take care of her employees. Although the salon does a steady business, Margaret says she is not focused on money. Her goal is to create a positive environment for her stylists (some of whom are Christians and some of whom are not) and her customers. She feels that the more Christians she employs, the better that environment will be. Margaret feels that her Christian employees do a good job of interjecting their faith in the conversations they have with customers. Conversations about church and church life are common. At least, the conversation is kept "clean" as Margaret puts it. Sometimes, just by paying attention to certain customers, these stylists take on the responsibility of being a redemptive presence for them. This exemplifies incarnational ministry. They bring Christ into the brief time that their customer is under their care. In terms of outreach, Margaret and her stylists work with many cancer patients. They send cards, create wigs for those who have lost hair, and provide services for free. The Christian employees even offer to pray for various customers (although not necessarily with them). Margaret hopes her hair salon will influence the Wyalusing community for Christ, and give glory to God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Wanda," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> "Margaret," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November, 2008.

And yet, even with such an effective use of such a strategic opportunity in the community, Margaret treads carefully when it comes to openly sharing her faith. During the interview, she said, "If we were to outwardly witness to every person who comes into the door, we would turn people off. You don't say to a person, 'Do you want a piece of pie?' and then shove the whole pie into their face. It is much better to offer a piece of pie at a time."<sup>13</sup> By reaching out to her customers with good service, a positive environment, and conversations seasoned with Christian love and care, Margaret hopes to offer her customers bites of a "pie" that will make them hungry for more.

In the months since the interview, Margaret reports more progress in establishing her salon as a positive Christian presence in the community and a way to nurture faith in her employees. She invited all of her employees to begin each day with group prayer. This is significant, since so many people express their felt needs when they come to the shop each day. For Margaret, it is an opportunity to share her faith with her employees, and pass it on should the opportunity arise during her work.<sup>14</sup>

It is significant to note that no men were included in the interview process. This reflects a glaring need at WPC and many other churches in the Wyalusing area. There are not many men who consider evangelism and discipleship important. The men represent a mission field all by themselves. There are some who attend church with their families, but not many who are open to going any deeper in their faith. Hopefully, with some sustained effort and prayer, the men of the community will

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<sup>13</sup> "Margaret," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November 2008.

<sup>14</sup> "Margaret," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, June 2009.



experience awakening and revival, and then take on leadership roles in the progressing mission of making disciples.

There are many more people who work in the area who have the potential to transform the community. There needs to be an awakening. Part of that awakening is an understanding of the Great Commission. The people who are in these strategic locations need to realize that God has placed them there for the overarching accomplishment of making disciples in all nations.

One of the challenges in the Wyalusing Community is open evangelism. Can a Christian approach a person and tell them about Jesus on the spot? Certainly, with sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, this can be done. However, there is an underlying mistrust of Christians who take this approach in Wyalusing. Probably, certain churches in the area have given evangelism a bad name throughout their history. Their strategies have been pushy, like shoving the pie into people's faces, as the owner of Genesis Salon put it.<sup>15</sup> The area is burned over by years of legalism and guilt broadcast from some outspoken local churches. Another problem with this approach is that most people in this small, rural community know each other all too well. When someone becomes a Christian, their integrity is already being challenged. These are a few of the obstacles to the confrontational of evangelism.

Instead, if Wyalusing's community of disciples could adopt the missional practices of the Celtic monastics, they may find more success in winning people to Christ. By inviting people to experience the hospitality of the WPC family, WPC's disciples may have a better chance at engaging people in discipleship, and eventually helping them understand and adopt faith in Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> "Margaret," interviewed by author, Wyalusing, PA, November, 2008.

## **The Transforming Church Index**

In order to better understand the identity of WPC and its strengths, as well as this church's potential for outreach and evangelism, the Session agreed to participate in the Transforming Church Index (TCI). When presented with this portion of the thesis project the Session readily agreed to participate in the TCI. They paid for the project through a recently received bequest. The congregation had from September 21, 2008 through October 20, 2008 to complete the survey. Thirty-six people participated. While this seemed to be a low number, the TCI administrators communicated that this number represented about half of the average worship attendance of seventy-three. Therefore, it provided a good sample of the church family. The demographics of the survey were broad, with a good span of age groups and both men and women taking part. After the results of the survey came back, the church leadership discussed them thoroughly. Some of the results were surprising, some were disappointing, and some were as expected. Overall, the initial effect of the TCI was helpful in terms of understanding the church's strengths and planning strategies for evangelism/outreach.<sup>16</sup>

The TCI is a survey designed to measure a church's effectiveness in five areas: Consumerism/Community, Incongruence/Code; Autocracy/Shared Leadership; Cloister/Missional; and Inertia/Reinvention. These areas are explained in and illustrated Kevin Ford's book *Transforming Church*.<sup>17</sup> While all of these key indicators have some bearing on WPC's outreach and evangelism, the most

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<sup>16</sup> The Executive Summary of WPC's survey results are included in Appendix B.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2007).

significant results of the survey were in these areas: "Incongruence/Code," "Consumerism/ Community," and "Cloister/ Missional."<sup>18</sup>

The first key indicator that stood out was Consumerism/Community. This key indicator measures how well people relate to one another.<sup>19</sup> This relationship value—Community—is set opposite Consumerism. With Consumerism, people just come to church to acquire personal happiness based on products or programs that the church offers.<sup>20</sup> In a world that highly values the wants and needs of individuals, the church should offer community as a healthy alternative. "In a healthy community members experience social connections, caring relationships, and feel personally connected to the church's overall purpose."<sup>21</sup> Community draws individuals into a body or family, and gives them a sense of belonging. Like the ancient Celtic monastics, contemporary churches that highly value community are in a position to help newcomers find a church home by putting a priority on helping them belong.

WPC scored very well in this area. Each of the three components of the Consumerism/Community Indicator is well above the national average. People at WPC feel that they have a personal connection to the church's purpose (scoring in the ninety-first percentile). Additionally, people at WPC feel socially connected to one another (scoring in the eighty-eighth percentile). Finally, people at WPC experience caring relationships with others in the congregation (scoring in the eighty-eighth percentile).<sup>22</sup> This indicates that our "members feel very connected to what the

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<sup>18</sup> The results of the TCI survey are included in Appendix B.

<sup>19</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix B.

church is about, [the] church has an exceptional atmosphere of fellowship and belonging, and in [the] church individuals feel extremely valued and loved."<sup>23</sup>

The second key indicator is "Incongruence/Code." This refers to the church's basic personality or DNA. Kevin Ford says, "Transforming churches are congruent—they have a relationship to a fixed point, which serves as a true north. Our consulting firm, TAG, calls this fixed point the church's *code*."<sup>24</sup> The code of an organization is its identity. "A church's code gives it a sense of collective personality and uniqueness."<sup>25</sup> "Code shapes tradition, values, and mission."<sup>26</sup> According to Ford, transforming churches are congruent with their codes. Their ministries are built upon their codes. Churches are incongruent when they don't know who they are, and they attempt to implement ministries that don't match their DNA.<sup>27</sup> It is like a person trying to be something he or she is not. Conflict results.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, to be effective, a church must know its code and shape its ministries around this basic identity.

WPC scored well below the national average on most of the areas of Incongruence/Code key indicator. In the first category of this key indicator, "Personal Growth," WPC fell within the national average at the forty-fourth percentile. That means most of the survey takers felt okay about their personal spiritual growth at WPC. In the second category, "Unique Focus," WPC scored very low: eighteenth percentile. Similarly, in the third category, "Excitement About the Church," WPC

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<sup>23</sup> Transforming Church Index: Wyalusing Presbyterian Church. Surveys collected from September 21, 2008 through October 20, 2008, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 57 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>25</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 57.

<sup>28</sup> Ford reports that "A church incongruent with its code is the single greatest cause of conflict we see at TAG and it creates far more damage than clashes over personal differences, worship styles, or even theology," *Transforming Church*, 57.

scored in the fifteenth percentile. These are very low scores, and rather disappointing.

These Incongruence/Code scores should alert the leadership of the church that something is wrong. The church is not in touch with its unique code, its identity and purpose. The leadership needs to figure out what makes WPC unique, and build excitement about that quality. In addition, the leaders need to facilitate more opportunities for personal and spiritual growth, as indicated in the TCI Executive Summary (see appendix). As this has to do with discipleship, it may afford an opportunity for the church leaders to explore the Celtic monastic model, and the disciplines they employed to move inquirers and visitors from belonging to behaving and believing.

The last indicator that showed significant results for WPC's evangelism and outreach is the Cloister/Missional key indicator. Ford says, "Transforming churches exist for those on the outside. Reaching out to the others is clearly one of God's primary purposes for the church.... A transforming church is one that has a clear and focused sense of mission beyond its walls, regardless of its personality or worship style."<sup>29</sup> WPC scored solidly within the national norms for this indicator. On the category labeled "Meets Needs," referring to meeting the needs of the church's various demographic segments (children, seniors, young adults, etc.), WPC scored in the fifty-ninth percentile. WPC does a good job with children in Sunday School, teenagers with a very active youth group, and with young adults (20-35 year olds, especially those with young families) through a recently formed young adults group. Many people from these three demographic segments who are involved in their

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<sup>29</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 12.

relative groups are not members of the church. This underscores WPC's high degree of hospitality and community, which helps newcomers gain a sense of belonging. However, there is room for improvement, especially in the young adult category. This very large group is not at all interested in spiritual growth, especially not the men. They have a good time together, and they will get together for a work project, but they do not want to do anything spiritual.

However, there is potential danger in the "Meets Needs" category with respect to WPC's strong sense of community. The members do a great job of taking care of one another. The danger is that sometimes this community is difficult to crack for those who enter the front doors of the church uninvited. In WPC's small congregation (averaging seventy-three in worship), some of elders have been known to be completely oblivious that there are new people who sit on the other side of the sanctuary from them! This is close to a "cloister" mentality, where the community "'walls out' those who are unfamiliar with their traditions or dogma."<sup>30</sup> WPC should work to build an evangelistic mission on the strength of its community, concentrating on helping new people belong and inviting them to go deeper by participating in the church's discipleship. Conversely, WPC needs to beware that the focus of that community could easily shift inward.

The second category in the Cloister/Missional key indicator is "Local Impact." This refers to how well the church reaches out to minister to the local community. Once again, WPC scored solidly within the national average (forty-fifth percentile). On the one hand, it may be that so many outside groups use the building that those surveyed believe WPC has a good relationship with the community.

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<sup>30</sup> Ford, *Transforming Church*, 12.

Groups that meet in the building include Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-anon, the local musical society, and others. On the other hand, WPC has struggled with the idea of local missions, and is just now warming up to the idea that people can participate in hands-on projects through existing local organizations. Furthermore, there are local mission organizations such as food banks, crisis centers for women, and organizations to help local residents in financial trouble with whom WPC could partner for financial support. This would be in addition to the five special offerings that support denominational missions each year and other denominational mission support. So while there is the correct perception that WPC has a positive local impact, much more could be done if the leadership planned for it.

There are two other key indicators in the TCI survey: Autocracy/Shared Leadership and Inertia/Reinvention. WPC scored within the national averages for these areas with some notable exceptions in the sub-categories. First, in the Autocracy/Shared Leadership indicator, the church scored extremely high in the "Financial Leadership" category, and fairly low in the "Effective Management" category. According to the TCI Executive Summary (Appendix B), "effective management" refers to setting direction, accomplishing goals, and communicating with members about those things. This is a growing edge at WPC, and the leadership has been working to make improvements over the years. Still, change is slow, especially when classes of leaders are required by the denomination's polity to change each year. Still, there are no major concerns with the Autocracy/Shared Leadership indicator.

Finally, WPC scored within the national average in the Inertia/Reinvention key indicator. WPC is similar to other churches when it comes to communication about change (fifty-ninth percentile) and embracing change (thirtieth percentile). These scores indicate that not too many changes have been made over the years. What may need to be addressed by the church leaders is the “Innovation and Creativity” category. Scoring in the nineteenth percentile, the members of WPC do not see the church as very creative or innovative. However, this author’s observation is that in a small church with a traditional worship style, creativity and innovation must be subtle, or it may be rejected outright.

The TCI survey gives the leadership at WPC much to think about and work towards. While there is positive news about the church’s sense of community, there are definitely weaknesses in the area of discipleship, reflected in the low Incongruence/Code scores. Additionally, there is little excitement among those surveyed about the church. If WPC wants to help the people who feel that they belong to the church move towards discipleship behavior and eventually belief, then these weaknesses must be addressed. Furthermore, the church must not fear creative solutions to challenges, and the people must learn to embrace change. This may be the best time and place to begin formally teaching the leadership about the Celtic monastic model. For what this survey revealed, this was a worthwhile phase of the thesis project that can greatly effect WPC’s developing a kingdom outpost mentality.



## The Small Group

The small group segment of the project had a dual purpose. The first purpose was to introduce characteristics of a Celtic evangelistic method gleaned from George Hunter's book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* to key members of the WPC congregation. The second purpose was to further the church's discipleship ministry by facilitating the growth of small groups. If successful, this method of encouraging evangelism and facilitating discipleship through small group ministry would be reproducible throughout WPC and transferable to other congregations.

For this phase of the project, an existing small group at WPC was invited to take on this eight-session study.<sup>31</sup> Because the group had been meeting together for some time, they were able to forego much of the history-giving and ice-breaking necessary for a small group that starts from scratch. This allowed the group to immediately begin discussing the characteristics of Celtic evangelism and the discipleship practices of the Celtic monastic community. The group consisted of three married couples that are active in the church. Two members of the group were active elders serving on the church session. One member was serving as the session clerk. A fourth member was serving as a deacon. Thus, these are potentially influential members of WPC, and they agreed to take on this segment of the project.<sup>32</sup>

Each week, the small group met to worship together and discuss one characteristic of Celtic evangelism and discipleship. The group utilized morning or evening prayer based on the order found in *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and*

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<sup>31</sup> The Small Group Sessions were held in the homes of the members during October and November of 2009.

<sup>32</sup> A copy of the Celtic Evangelism and Discipleship Small Group Study is included in Appendix C.

*Readings From the Northumbria Community*.<sup>33</sup> After a brief time of welcome and conversation, the group opened with one of these prayers, and began discussion. At the end of each session, the group closed by completing the prayer selection from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

The first part of the discussion revolved around a ledger sheet entitled *Evangelism and Spiritual Contact Ledger*<sup>34</sup> that each member of the group filled out during the week. The ledger sheet was designed to help members keep track of their daily spiritual conversations, invitations, and opportunities for personal evangelism in their various strategic locations. This format was chosen over a journal format with the male participants in mind. This design was intentional so that the men would be less inhibited to record their experiences, rather than simply recording them in a blank journal.

At each meeting, the members were supposed to report on their spiritual contacts and/or evangelistic opportunities so the group could discuss them and pray for the people contacted. This segment of the study proved enlightening. Sometimes people utterly ignored this exercise. Some group members even seemed resentful of it, and never filled out a ledger. Others were surprised when, during discussion about what had happened the previous week, group members pointed out that certain conversations could have been recorded. For instance, one member talked about a conversation with her young granddaughter in which she was answering the little girl's questions about her faith. The conversation was perfectly natural, and in no

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<sup>33</sup> The Northumbria Community is a modern day expression of a monastic community that follows the order of life and teachings of the ancient Celtic monastics. The community exists in the Northumbria region of England, an area greatly influenced by Celtic monastics in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. For more about this community, see their website: [www.northumbriacommunity.org](http://www.northumbriacommunity.org).

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix C.

way contrived as a confrontational evangelistic encounter, illustrating the principle in 1 Peter 3:15-16. The grandmother was simply sharing the reason for the hope that she had in Christ and telling her granddaughter why she went to church. When the group pointed out that this was a spiritual conversation that she could have recorded on her sheet, and more importantly that could help her granddaughter believe in Jesus, she seemed taken aback. She had never thought of such a conversation that way. And yet, this kind of conversation is exactly what the project was all about—preparing disciples of Jesus to talk about their faith with people with whom they have relationships in the course of their daily lives. Although the ledger sheets were only moderately successful, helping group members to identify this type of natural spiritual conversation flowing from their life of discipleship was the main point of the exercise.<sup>35</sup>

Ideally, along with helping the group members to identify opportunities for spiritual conversations and evangelism, they would also lead people to Christ. Following the Celtic monastic model, these small group members would engage those within their sphere of influence during daily living in spiritual conversations (making use of their strategic locations). The outcome of these conversations would be evangelistic or at least result in an invitation to church, where the hospitality of the congregation would take over. From there, the new people would enter the life of the church, feeling a sense of belonging as they gradually grow in their understanding of the Christian faith, and eventually come to believe in Christ, making a commitment to be his disciples.

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<sup>35</sup> Other information on outcomes of the Spiritual Conversations Ledger Sheet is available in Chapter 5.

The second part of the small group discussion revolved around eight characteristics of the Celtic monastic method of evangelism and discipleship gleaned from Hunter's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*. These characteristics were not listed as such in the book, but were distilled from Hunter's observations of the ancient Celtic Christians. They are:

1. Prayers for our Spheres of Influence: for felt needs, blessings, and opportunities;
2. Strategically located: making use of the places God has put people;
3. Hospitality is key: The Church welcomes people (belonging);
4. Looking for Points of Contact: Contextualization;
5. Incarnational Ministry: Bringing Jesus into every situation;
6. Invitation: Inviting people to be our church's guests;
7. Community is Vital: Upholding one another and grow as disciples together, the community demonstrates the kingdom of heaven to the world;
8. Faith is Caught: Each disciple may or may not have a chance to initially share the gospel, but if he or she invites others to come to our church, welcome them with hospitality, and include guests in ongoing discipleship opportunities, there may be more chances to explain the gospel, and they may catch the faith in time.

Each session focused on one of these characteristics with accompanying Scripture passages. The central question is, "Can these characteristics from the ancient Celtic monastics come to describe contemporary churches today?" Hopefully, by learning about and experiencing these eight characteristics, the members of the group can help to transform WPC. If the group is successful, it may serve as a pilot group for similar small groups at WPC. If the results are transferable, similar small groups can transform the evangelism and discipleship of churches beyond WPC's ministry context so that they can reach their communities for Christ as effectively as did the ancients.

The small group explored and experimented with the eight characteristics of ancient Celtic monastic communities. They explored the possibility of local churches

becoming places where people in surrounding or adjacent communities can come to worship, learn, work together, and grow in their faith. The local church can learn to be a place where the door is always open, and those inside are ready to welcome inquirers, people who are invited by church members, or simply the curious. Local churches can develop discipleship programs similar to the Celtic monastic communities so that when a person comes in they have the opportunity to discover, experience, learn about, and grow their understanding and develop faith in Jesus Christ. This small group experience helped to exhibit WPC's strengths and weaknesses in these areas.

As discovered in the TCI, WPC is has a strong sense of community coupled with the Celtic monastic characteristic of a high emphasis on hospitality. The weaknesses that the TCI revealed revolved around discipleship. The church is always glad to help people feel a sense of belonging. However, they are not always ready to engage them in discipleship opportunities, even when such opportunities become available. While the small group phase of this project was itself an exercise in discipleship, the church has not widely facilitated similar exercises. There have been occasional short-term Bible studies and prayer groups, but no regular plan for discipleship. The Small Group in this phase of the project continues to meet with their own agenda, and that is to be applauded, but the idea of an extensive small group ministry that follows the Celtic monastic format has not been duplicated.

In time, the desired result of this phase of the project is to help the members of WPC view themselves as an outpost of the kingdom of God, much like the Celtic monastic communities on the frontiers of the Roman Empire. It could be the

beginning of a new style of monasticism based on the model of the ancient Celtic Christians. This new monasticism would not cloister disciples away from society. Instead, it is meant transform existing local churches. The small group explored the possibility of the local church adopting the new monastic perspective. Can disciples at any church take advantage of their strategic locations within their neighborhoods, in the marketplace, or even on farms and fields for the purpose of influencing people for Christ, inviting them to church, welcoming them with hospitality, walking with them in the spiritual life of the church community, and guide them into discipleship?

### **Conclusion**

The three phases of the thesis-project—interviews, the TCI, and the small group—served as the first steps towards guiding WPC into a stronger position for fulfilling the Great Commission. Although change in a rural small town church happens slowly, these initial steps were designed to open the eyes of faithful disciples within WPC to the mission of the church—to make disciples. These steps helped members learn to invite and welcome newcomers, utilizing the church's strengths: community, hospitality, and creating a sense of belonging. Finally, the project was designed to teach small groups of members the principles utilized by the ancient Celtic evangelists to help people catch faith in Christ. Overall, the project was designed to nudge WPC toward the realization that the church is an outpost of God's kingdom, meant to reach people for Christ, and help them to become his disciples so that God is ultimately glorified as supreme, and Christ is recognized as Lord. The outcome of these three phases of the thesis project will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES AND REFLECTIONS

#### **Introduction**

Based on the foundations of Scripture and evangelical theology, informed by relevant literature, the three phases of the project were undertaken. The desired outcomes of the thesis project were potentially transformational and informative. Hope continues that the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church is being transformed in mindset and practice. The church was to be transformed to a mindset congruent with that of the ancient Celtic monastic communities. As such, the church would begin to see itself as an agent through which the kingdom of God would expand in Wyalusing and the surrounding townships. In short, WPC would begin to see itself as an outpost of God's kingdom.

In practice, the desired outcome is the hope that transformation would happen through a greater awareness among the church members that they have been divinely and strategically placed in the community for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, and for the growing knowledge of Christ's supremacy to the glory of God. WPC's growing disciples would make use of their placement, make regular daily points of contact in the community to share their faith within their sphere of influence, and at least invite people to church. Like the ancient Celtic monastic communities that welcomed outsiders and quickly engaged them in discipleship, those who would enter WPC through worship services or fellowship opportunities would be warmly welcomed and invited to participate. As ancient seekers found

themselves belonging, behaving like, and eventually believing the faith of the monastic communities, those who come to the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church family would hopefully be introduced to and transformed by a life of discipleship.

The mindset of the WPC family must change for this desired result to happen. Once the church's mindset changes, the desired result would be a change in practice. Those members of WPC who are firmly committed would themselves grow in their practice of discipleship. As the church facilitates opportunities for prayer, Bible study, worship, stewardship, service, etc., participants at various stages of spiritual maturity would have a chance to participate and grow. They might get involved in a prayer group, a Bible study group, a group intent on social outreach and community service, or something yet to be formulated. The resulting spiritual growth would round out in mature Christians going back into the surrounding community with an understanding of their strategic placement. Hopefully, they would be prepared to repeat the process of reaching those within their sphere of influence by sharing the gospel or at least inviting new people to church. Thus, the cycle would continue for the kingdom outpost of WPC. Ideally, WPC would more successfully help fulfill the Great Commission, more people would recognize the supremacy of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and God's kingdom would grow.

Were the desired outcomes achieved? Partially. While the whole church family was not thoroughly transformed in mindset and practice, the thesis project coupled with preaching on the church's transformational role in society through evangelism and discipleship began to take root in various individuals at WPC. The results of the thesis project were informative for the leaders as they plan for WPC's



growth. The interviews revealed that some are greatly aware of their strategic location in the community, and have a strong desire to make an impact for Christ within their sphere of influence. Others did not show as much awareness of this. The Transforming Church Index revealed areas of strength compatible with Celtic monastic communities that could lead to effective evangelism and discipleship. The small group revealed that some transformation is taking place, and some church members are already engaged in what amounts to Celtic-style evangelism and discipleship. However, on the whole, the church is lacking in this area. As a church, discipleship is an area where awareness of each disciple's responsibility to take the Great Commission seriously must grow. It is one thing to sit around and talk about our views in small groups, classes or at meetings, but quite another to get busy and be obedient to Jesus' instructions to make disciples. At best, this thesis project showed the beginnings of transformation in mindset and practice. At least, the project provided information to guide future spiritual growth at WPC.

### **Interviews: Are Members of WPC Aware of Their Strategic Location?**

Regarding the first phase of the thesis project, the interviews, promising information about the ongoing transformation in mindset and practice came to light. Some of those interviewed showed that they were very aware of their responsibilities to share their faith, live incarnationally in the community, and to do so with respect to the rural small town ministry context. The language of postmodernism may not have meant much to them, but they are living and working within that context anyway. Some of these interviewees were already aware of their strategic location at work, at

home, and in various social settings outside of the church. They expressed their intentionality to be an influence for Christ and pray for their coworkers, neighbors and family members. This was part of the desired outcome of the project.

Jane, the elementary special education teacher, continues to effectively utilize her strategic location within her sphere of influence. During the interview, she reported that other teachers know of her faith and church involvement. They do not hesitate to ask her about this important part of her life. Her influence on other teachers as well as on her students is incarnational. Jane understands that she brings Christ into the school, even if she cannot “proselytize.” However, when asked, she does not hesitate to “give a reason for the hope that she has,” (1 Peter 3:15). Also, because the church facilitates opportunities to welcome friends, Jane has made contact with elementary school students and their parents at church when they come. In answer to the questions posed in chapter 4, it is fair to say that Jane understands her strategic placement, and seeks to bring Christ into her sphere of influence with both students and coworkers. She does not hesitate to bring new people into the church, and is herself practicing discipleship.

Cindy, the owner of the local coffee shop, appears to have a good understanding of her strategic placement for the expansion of God’s kingdom. From the beginning, she and her sister intended their coffee shop to be a place where people could experience hospitality, the warmth of friendship, engage in spiritual conversations, and bring glory to God. She has invited several customers to church as well as engaging regular customers with whom she has developed good relationships in evangelistic conversations. Some of the people she has invited have been people in

crisis who need a solid caring community for support. She deals regularly with people who ask questions out of a postmodern worldview, respecting their differences, but not compromising the message of the gospel. Cindy's easy style is a good fit for a small town like Wyalusing. While engaging in regular commerce with people in the community, Cindy has made the most of the opportunities she has had to influence people for Christ in nonthreatening ways.

Margaret, the owner of hair salon, has maintained her stance that her business exists to be Christ's presence in the community (incarnational). She is deliberate in her efforts to make use of her strategic location to influence people for Christ, if not in words, through the demonstration of love and care for her clients. She never hesitates to recommend a Christian book or devotional material to inquirers. The Christmas following the interview, she even purchased a case of Bibles, and gave them away. Several people have attended church at her invitation. Margaret is a little bolder than Cindy. Like Cindy, she has created a positive, caring, and sublimely Christian atmosphere in her business that is in no way off-putting. However, she seems to be more open to sharing her faith with people, even if she does so in small bites. Her long-lasting relationships with clients must help her here. At any rate, Margaret has grown in her understanding of utilizing her strategic location to help fulfill the Great Commission.

These three women demonstrate that at least some of the members of WPC are living out the model of the ancient Celtic monastics. Just as the monastics sought to bring Christ into the marketplace and invite people into their community, these three women bring Christ into their workplace and never hesitate to invite people to

church. They readily pray for those with whom they work and for their customers, just as the Celtic monastic prayed for people they encountered in neighboring settlements.<sup>1</sup> They make use of opportunities to talk about their faith with respect to the different views of others. Jane, Cindy, and Margaret greatly exemplify these aspects of the Celtic monastic model of evangelism. They have helped WPC grow toward becoming an outpost of God's kingdom in the Wyalusing community.

The interviews with the other two women showed some signs of transformation, but also that the focus of their gifts is within the church family. The interview with Angela, the school nurse, indicated that she somewhat understands her various positions in the community as strategic for the kingdom of God. Her openness at work has helped to influence people for Christ. She seeks to influence others for Christ outside of work as well. For example, Angela is active in the local Boy Scouts, and she views that work as another opportunity to introduce an awareness of God to adults and young people. She practices spiritual disciplines in her personal life, and she is very active at church. She is not afraid to talk about Christianity.

However, there did not seem to be an evangelistic edge in the interview with Angela. It is as if she wants to teach and transfer Christian values to people with whom she comes into contact, focusing more on morality than spirituality. She is willing and intentional about passing her faith along within the church context. In fact, she is passionate about it within the Sunday School program. Perhaps her passion lends itself well to discipleship once people come into the church, and historically, this is where her talents have been utilized.

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<sup>1</sup> George G. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 22.

Wanda, who works in the school administration office, had never thought of her job as a strategic location for the expansion of God's kingdom. While she works hard at her job, and is a genuinely good thoughtful person, she does not seem to want to engage in spiritual conversations with people, nor does she think of evangelizing. She does not prioritize utilizing her strategic position to pray for either her coworkers or the school system in general. This may indicate that she has not incorporated her faith into her daily living as effectively as the other interviewees. More likely, she simply does not consider evangelism important. She remains a positive and influential member of the church, serving as an elder and taking on a large roll in facilitating opportunities for hospitality. This is important when people from outside of the church community come to visit. In this way, she is effective in helping WPC become an outpost for God's kingdom.

The outcome of the interviews revealed some promising results for WPC. On the one hand, two of the women interviewed—Cindy and Margaret—went into business specifically to bring the influence of God's kingdom to the community. Through their work in the marketplace, they have spoken openly about living a life of discipleship. They have utilized their relationships to share their faith. They have been invitational. They have been incarnational.

Likewise, Jane has incorporated her faith in incarnational ways at work. Although she does not have the freedom to openly proselytize, she has made use of opportunities to share her faith and commitment to church. She has been incarnational in a setting in which open expressions of Christianity have been frowned upon (public school). She has made use of her points of contact with

colleagues and students to share how she practices her faith. These are good examples of modern application of the principles of Celtic evangelism.

On the other hand, Angela and Wanda may be less effective in the field and more effective within the church community. While Angela is open about her faith even in the workplace, her strengths are in teaching and administrating the Sunday School program. She is a valuable asset to the discipleship program at WPC. Wanda is quieter about her faith, even within an office full of fellow Christians. Yet she has a great talent for organizing events at which the hospitality of the church can be utilized.

In reflection upon these interviews, they represent the spectrum of awareness of various members of WPC regarding the Celtic principles of strategic location and spheres of influence. Gradually, members of WPC—disciples of Christ who are actively growing in their faith—have a better understanding of the Great Commission and their role in helping fulfill it. The shift of perspective toward viewing WPC as a kingdom outpost will be easier for them. Some members are less prone to openly exhibit or demonstrate the kingdom of heaven to the world. They may be less involved in WPC's discipleship opportunities such as Bible study groups or prayer groups, but they are still involved in personal spiritual disciplines like daily Bible reading and observing quiet moments of prayer. This second group may be more than willing to serve within the church, especially in ministries of hospitality, but less ready to share their faith in the community or at the workplace. Of course, there are many people in the church that do not practice discipleship at all. They are simply there for social reasons or to satisfy their perceived moral obligations.

More information about the congregation's readiness to undertake the missions of evangelism and discipleship as an outpost of God's kingdom emerged in the TCI survey.

### **The TCI Survey: WPC's Strengths and Weaknesses**

The Transforming Church Index (TCI) yielded some constructive results in three areas, with less significant opportunities for growth in a couple of other categories. Of the areas measured, the most significant indicators were the Incongruence/Code indicator, the Consumerism/Community indicator, and the Cloister/Missional indicator.

First, the survey revealed one highly significant area of weakness: the Incongruence/Code indicator. The survey results for WPC reported, "Comparing your church to national norms, the church's leadership should explore why members are not excited about the church, your church scored very low in terms of having a sense of identity and focus, and your church is in the middle of the road when it comes to personal and spiritual growth."<sup>2</sup> This was somewhat alarming, and one area that the church leadership must continue to explore. The church must identify its code for transformation in mindset and practice towards evangelism and more effective outreach.

If this weakness is to be properly addressed, the church leaders need to explore some basic questions about purpose and direction. Why does WPC exist? What has WPC's place in the Wyalusing community been over the last fifty years?

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<sup>2</sup> Transforming Church Index: Wyalusing Presbyterian Church. Surveys collected from September 21, 2008 through October 20, 2008, 13. See Appendix B for the Executive Summary.

How has WPC's direction changed over the last ten to fifteen years? With the changes coming to the community through the influx of gas companies, out-of-state workers who are bringing relatively foreign values, and the resulting wealth and greed for some and poverty for others, what is WPC's role? It may be the pastor's job to ask these questions, but the leadership of the church needs to figure out some relevant answers.

If the church is to have a significant impact on fulfilling the Great Commission in the Wyalusing, then it needs to have purpose and direction. The leadership needs to communicate this information to the rest of the church with excitement. When people come to WPC, they need to hear this purpose immediately and frequently.

This weakness needs to be addressed at the discipleship level. In understanding and connecting with the church's purpose and direction, WPC needs to grow in its disciple-making strategy. Spiritual growth opportunities must not be limited to Sunday School and Sunday morning worship. Small groups such as the one in phase three of this project must be planned and carried out. The church's purpose and direction must be communicated in these growth opportunities. When people come into the church, whether at the invitation of a faithful disciple in the marketplace or if they just happen to come in on a Sunday morning, the church's vision and purpose must be communicated. The code of the church must ooze from the church's ministry and mission.

In later review of these results, the church leadership began to address these issues with enthusiasm. The church officers began to talk about reinventing and



rekindling enthusiasm for worship, Christian education, and reaching previously neglected demographic segments of the community (such as the young families). They made plans for extra groups and activities to interest people within the church. Still, the leadership has stopped short of plugging into that code, personality, or DNA that drives the church. Over time, this enthusiasm has calmed down. There is still some enthusiasm to reach targeted groups, but this reach stops short of discipleship. The leaders seem satisfied to have people coming to worship, young adult groups and coffee hours, but do not seem to want to nudge people from these groups towards deeper relationships with God.

The second key indicator that calls for reflection is the Consumer/Community indicator. It is possible that WPC's code is revealed in the second important indicator: the strength of its community. A number of years ago, one of the members began calling the congregation "the church family," and for those who are faithful members, this is an apt description. The challenge for WPC is how to build on this code in the areas of outreach and evangelism. Can those who are involved in the community view those they touch as potential members of the WPC family? Can those who are strategically located invite people into this strong but open community of disciples? Can the church create a sense of belonging for those inquirers who enter this strong community at WPC—a sense of belonging that goes beyond social connections to spiritual growth through discipleship opportunities?

Additionally, guiding people from belonging to believing remains a challenge. As revealed in the Incongruence/Code indicator, church leaders seem content with people coming to social events. The low score on the Incongruence/Code indicator

reveals the need for a stronger discipleship plan. If the leadership of the church could incorporate the strong sense of community with opportunities for spiritual growth and discipleship, perhaps more people could understand and participate in the church's purpose. While spiritual disciplines have been the subject of sermons and studies, many of the members have yet to pick up on their vital importance. It is time for the church leaders to step up and more regularly practice these disciplines, both the personal and the corporate. While the members of the church family have been great at welcoming visitors, they seldom encourage visitors to accompany them to discipleship opportunities like Bible studies, prayer groups, or even the Adult Sunday School class. The sense of belonging must be followed up with becoming/behaving, and move on towards believing.

The third indicator that has a significant bearing on WPC's evangelism and outreach is Cloister/Missional. Ford says, "Transforming churches exist for those on the outside. Reaching out to the others is clearly one of God's primary purposes for the church... A transforming church is one that has a clear and focused sense of mission beyond its walls, regardless of its personality or worship style."<sup>3</sup> WPC scored solidly within the national norms for this indicator. However, as pointed out in chapter four, WPC needs to be aware of the potential danger of becoming a closed, cloistered community.

In such a small town experiencing big changes, people may view the church as one place that they can rely upon to be the same every time they enter. The traditions of the church may provide a sense of security amidst the uncertainty. The

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<sup>3</sup> Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2007), 12.

challenge is to remain open, evangelistic, hospitable, and community oriented as opposed to cloistered in the midst of such changes. Surely there will be those who have been tossed about by the changes in the area who need a solid welcoming community like WPC to which they can belong. That church community should provide opportunities for them to find their security in a growing relationship with God over and above the traditions of the church.

The Cloister/Missional indicator calls for more reflection. How can WPC do a better job of partnering with existing local missions? There are several Christian faith based local organizations that help area residents with problems from hunger to crisis pregnancies and even home repair for those who cannot afford it. Even though some individual members at WPC have participated in these organizations, the church has yet to partner with them in any formal sense. Following the Celtic model, partnering with local missions that are already impacting the surrounding communities might go a long way towards helping WPC with its evangelistic outreach. This may be the most important area for growth if WPC is to become an outpost of God's kingdom.

Overall, the TCI was a positive experience. It now falls to the church leaders to make good use of the results. They need to tap into the code—the strong community—and build programs for evangelism and discipleship around it. They need to be welcoming to the stranger as well as to the familiar faces that come to worship and other opportunities to touch the church family. They need to go beyond being happy that a new person or family is in the pew on any given week, and invite that person to a group or class designed to facilitate spiritual growth through

discipleship. They need to subtly employ creativity and innovation in the various ministries of the church, especially in the area of discipleship. And they need not fear change. In time, building on the church family's community and hospitality will lead to increased numbers as well as more opportunities to build disciples.

### **The Small Group: Is WPC Ready for Small Group Discipleship?**

The third phase of the thesis project was a small group study. This study was an exercise in discipleship. It examined the effective evangelism and discipleship strategies of the ancient Celtic monastics, and the feasibility of implementing these strategies in WPC's ministry context. The group yielded some positive outcomes that call for reflection. While the group was designed to be a pilot for a more organized small group ministry at WPC, any successive small groups have yet to materialize. The probable reason for this is that the established group was not prepared to break up so that the members could lead successive small groups. Their commitment to one another was too high for this to happen. This group continues to meet, even though they do not discuss evangelism or follow the format used during the thesis project.

The first outcome of the small group phase of the project had to do with the Evangelism and Spiritual Conversation Contact Ledger. Four of the six members of the group took the time to keep records of their spiritual conversations. Group members spoke to family members, people with whom they work, people in their carpools, friends, and customers when they had a chance. Some members were more ready to engage in these conversations than others. Some of these conversations yielded positive results, some people were open to further conversations, and a few

people accepted invitations to visit WPC. Others were simply closed to further conversation. The group members were respectful of those with whom they conversed, which fits well within the idea of having spiritual conversations in the postmodern era.

One member supplied extensive notes to explain her ledger entries. She was bold and creative in initiating spiritual conversations. Some of her conversations were more evangelistic, and others were more therapeutic. For instance, she spoke to one person who was having trouble with her marriage, simply offering encouragement. In another conversation, she spoke to a person who was an environmental studies major. While the conversation revolved around the evolution vs. creation debate, this small group member was able to steer the conversation towards faith in Christ and even baptism. She determined that the person was not ready to make such a commitment, but felt that she offered her grace, something the person had not felt from other Christians she had known. Although they broached a hot topic—evolution—the conversation was never confrontational. The respectful and gracious manner of the conversation left things open for further discussion. This group member illustrates the Celtic evangelistic principle of making use of one's strategic location—the marketplace—to bring Christ to those within one's sphere of influence. With respect to the postmodern ministry context, the encounter was built on relationship, and not on confrontation, and yet the uniqueness of Christ was upheld.

The other group members who recorded their conversations had moderating degrees of success. Some conversations actually resulted in people coming into the

church. At other times, the group discussed spiritual conversations they had had with people that they did not realize was an opportunity for evangelism. For example, one grandmother spoke with her granddaughter about her faith, the Bible, and church. The grandmother had occasionally brought her grandchildren to church. She discussed this matter-of-factly during one of the small group meetings. However, until other group members pointed this out, the grandmother did not realize it was an evangelistic opportunity or even a spiritual conversation. The group helped to open her eyes and heighten her awareness to the opportunities God was bringing to her life. She became more aware of her strategic location within her sphere of influence. One of the good things about the Small Group Sessions was the awakening to the numerous faith-sharing opportunities that God brings to his disciples. In this sense, the exercise succeeded.

The second part of the Small Group phase was the exploration of eight principles of the Celtic monastic model gleaned from *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Hunter):

1. Prayers for our Spheres of Influence;
2. Strategically located;
3. Hospitality is key;
4. Looking for Points of Contact;
5. Incarnational Ministry;
6. Invitation;
7. Community is Vital;
8. Faith is Caught.

The group discussion was positive and enlightening. Group members felt that they learned from the exercise and from the Bible study. At times, the discussion focused on what WPC was already doing right. For instance, the group identified the

church's strong sense of community and hospitality. The concept of helping people feel that they belong to the community was noted as very important.

At other times, the group identified problems with WPC's discipleship ministry. In the discussion about community, one person pointed out a flaw in WPC's past practice. In the past, new people have often been asked to serve in leadership positions almost as soon as they formally join the church. The idea behind this has been that serving in such a capacity would help new people get to know WPC.<sup>4</sup> However, one member of the Small Group pointed out that this is not wise. The church should be asking more spiritually mature members to serve in leadership positions, and help new members and visitors to feel a greater sense of belonging. In time, as the newer people grow in discipleship and profess their faith in Christ (as Hunter puts, it faith is caught),<sup>5</sup> they will be better prepared to serve in leadership. The group agreed. It should be pointed out that the WPC Nominating Committee has moved away from this practice.

Two of the most effective sessions were "Praying for Our Spheres of Influence" and "Strategically Located." The main point of "Praying for Our Spheres of Influence" was to ask God to bless the people with whom one comes into contact, especially on a regular basis. This prayer could be a simple request for peace in the person's life. This corresponds to Hunter's teaching: "The 'apostolic' ... team would meet the people, engage them in conversation and in ministry, and look for people who appeared receptive. They would pray for sick people, and for possessed people, and they would counsel people and mediate conflicts. On at least one occasion,

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<sup>4</sup> It should be pointed out that the WPC Nominating Committee has moved away from this practice.

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 55.

Patrick blessed a river and prayed for the people to catch more fish.”<sup>6</sup> Group members were challenged to pray for each home or business that they passed by each day as well as to pray for the felt needs of people who shared with them. Additionally, they were challenged to ask God to open their own eyes to the opportunities for evangelism within their sphere of influence. In this way, the group learned to pray more regularly for their family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even their enemies. Some of the group members did incorporate this practice into their daily lives. While the group did not often discuss any results of this exercise, it was enlightening and challenging for the members. Further, this exercise may yet prove to be a key component in bringing people to Christ more readily in a postmodern context.<sup>7</sup>

The session on “Sphere of Influence” nicely supplemented the session on “Strategic Location.” The group members learned much on this topic. As evidenced in the spiritual conversation ledger sheets above, members of the group learned to utilize the relationships within their spheres of influence for sharing their faith and ministering to others. Utilizing existing relationships where trust has been built over time may have been one of the most important components of the group members’ invitations to visit the church being accepted. The postmodern context lends itself well to such relational evangelism with those who are strategically located within one’s sphere of influence.

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<sup>6</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Another good source of strategies for praying for one’s community is Ed Siloso, *Prayer Evangelism: How to Change the Spiritual Climate Over Your Home, Neighborhood, and City* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), especially Chapter 3, “How to Change the Spiritual Climate.”



The session on “Incarnational Ministry” was equally poignant. As the ancient Celtic monastics embodied God’s love and grace in the marketplace as well as within the monastic community, so the members of the group learned that as followers of Jesus they bring him into any and every situation in their daily lives. From there, they are more ready to pray for people, minister to people, serve people, and share their faith. As Jesus’ followers grow in their relationship with God through practicing spiritual disciplines and being involved in the church community, they are more attuned to the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. Thus they are better prepared to share Christ. Even the discussion on this proved to be challenging. One Scripture passage studied in this section was 1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12, which says, “Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. During group discussion on these verses, one member remarked, “that is hard to do in a work situation.” To which another member replied, “It’s not supposed to be easy in a work environment.” More discussion revolved around the question of how incarnational ministry affects relationships with other people. Does bringing Jesus into each situation necessarily make things better? There was no definitive answer, but the group was encouraged to ponder this question as they departed.

As a practical application of incarnational ministry, the group discussed the church’s incarnational presence in the Wyalusing Borough. Being strategically located in the middle of town, and subject to high visibility by gas company workers

on their way to and from work, the church is in an ideal strategic location to minister to these new residents. The group began to think of the church as Christ's presence in the town. While nothing has come of this discussion yet, the group began to ask how the church could offer these area workers an alternative to the local bars. Those who come to the church can experience its high emphasis on hospitality, and be invited into discipleship. In time, and with some intentionality, this aspect of the Celtic model could be put into practice.

The end results of the Small Group phase of the thesis project proved helpful to the members of the group. They were challenged to practice the eight aspects of the Celtic monastic way of evangelism, a model that in time may prove to be effective for a postmodern ministry context as well as a rural small town like Wyalusing. Sadly, this small group was not duplicated at WPC. At this point, the Celtic Evangelism Small Group has not been tried at another church.

What has come to light at WPC with respect to small groups is that many people are already in them, even though the groups are not organized as a small group ministry. The Senior Choir is a small group. The Session is a small group. The Deacons are a small group. Various Sunday school classes are small groups, especially the Adult Sunday School Class, which has studied the Bible together for years. Additionally, there are four people who are new to WPC who regularly attend the Adult Sunday School Class. These classes/small groups may be considered traditional groups for leadership or learning, but with a little tweaking, they could become communities that pray for one another, support one another, and through prayer might even spur one another on to evangelism and outreach. So while a

formal and organized small group ministry has not come about at WPC, many people are in small groups of one kind or another already.

The challenge for the people of WPC is to see their participation in existing groups as a way that they grow as disciples. Whether at a leadership team meeting or a class, the leaders need to incorporate disciple-making activities. For example, any existing group could include regular Scripture reading or any other form of Bible intake in their meetings. Each group could keep a prayer list of other members' needs to incorporate in personal prayer. This type of activity might prove more challenging for the trustees or for the building and grounds team, but if team leaders agree that it is important, discipleship could be incorporated across the board. This may be one way to spark interest in growing in spiritual maturity as well as fostering organizational growth.

An additional benefit of this change of perspective touches on regular visitors and new members. Team leaders, teacher, and other groups within the church can reach out to invite new people to participate in their class, group or team. Such invitation would help WPC guide people from simply having the sense that they belong to the community towards belief, a profession of faith in Christ and a commitment to the church. The church's code and direction would need to be demonstrated and communicated frequently for each group, team, or class. Likewise, the overarching commission from Jesus to make disciples would need to be frequently revisited. Yet, this format would help transform WPC in mindset and practice to a church that helps people grow spiritually as Jesus' disciples in all areas within the church family. The Celtic Small Group may not be repeated, but the ideas

can be communicated and demonstrated through other existing avenues. It would be a transformational step toward becoming an outpost for God's kingdom.

### **The Need for Awakening**

For some of the members of WPC to be effective evangelists, a simple change of perspective must take place. Conversations about evangelism must opening the eyes of key members to the opportunities that are already at their doorstep, and reorienting the way the WPC family sees itself in the community. The congregation has tremendous potential to be God's instruments to transform the Wyalusing community, but they need to be awakened to the possibilities at hand.

Members of WPC work in various strategic locations in the area. They need to realize that they are members of a Christian community who spend their workdays in a world in need of transformation, and that they are God's instruments to accomplish this mission. A spiritually needy world is literally at their doorstep.

Here are some areas of great potential for the WPC family. We have a number of schoolteachers, a school nurse, three people who work in the school administration office, various business owners, and shift workers for major industry around Wyalusing. Some of these members are well aware of their strategic location and their responsibility for outreach and evangelism. Others are oblivious, and seem to separate their identities as disciples of Jesus from their occupations, family lives, and social lives. They need a change in perspective to realize that they are in important places for evangelistic efforts. It may be that a greater emphasis on discipleship will change their hearts, but then, will they participate?

The evidence from this thesis project shows that WPC most certainly is in need of a spiritual awakening. While some in the church are practicing discipleship, growing in their faith, understanding their responsibility to share their faith, and be incarnational in the community, others are just becoming aware of these things through their participation in the life of the church. Some have been gathering to pray for awakening and revival for all of the churches in the area, including WPC. In answer to these faithful people offering prayers, God can bring the awakening and revival needed in Wyalusing. In the preface to their book *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth*, Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless offer encouragement:

There is a fresh wind blowing in our land today. Prayer has become the most important principle of church growth. God is blessing new churches, nontraditional churches and, yes, even traditional churches. We are convinced that the revival which will come soon to America will have its base in many of the churches once declared terminally ill.<sup>8</sup>

Even so, change in a small church does not usually happen over night. The building blocks are in place: a strong sense of community, a generous and welcoming hospitality, a growing openness to practicing spiritual disciplines. People are coming into the church for worship and for learning. Eventually, with God's help, WPC can become an outpost for God's kingdom, employing ancient methods in a postmodern ministry context to help fulfill the Great Commission for the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth* (Crestwood, KY: Pinnacle Publishers, 2003), vii.

## Conclusion

D. A. Carson aptly summarizes the kind of church WPC is moving towards:

What we should strive for, surely, is a church that is full of teaching (doctrinal, ethical, historical, spiritual), rigorous in its discipleship, and patently faithful in its exercise of godly discipline--*and at the same time* a church in which believers know how to communicate with nonbelievers, a church whose public meetings, however full of teaching and discipline they may be, are authentic in all they do, welcoming and warm to strangers, and careful to apply the Scriptures to all of life, with contemporary probings that are simultaneously faithful to Scripture and culturally penetrating. At one level, that church will be saying that you have to *become* a Christian to *belong*; at another level, that church will be so authentic in its communication, so warm in its acceptance of people as people, so genuine in its belief and conduct, that outsiders will be attracted. And that church may have many forms of ministry--Bible studies for biblically illiterate outsiders, for instance, run on a gentle, inductive basis--in which nonbelievers will feel comfortable. They may not belong to the church but they may belong to this study group, or to the group of people who engage in Habitat for Humanity projects, or countless other ventures. Christians in such a church will gradually learn, out of sheer love for people, to try to get across, with winsome gentleness, what the Bible says, while refusing to soft-pedal the Bible in any way.

Actually, this sort of tension between belonging and becoming may prove to be *more* evangelistically fruitful than churches that slide toward one of the two extremes.<sup>9</sup>

The church Carson is describing is one that begins with belonging and moves people towards believing. It is a church that welcomes people with hospitality, allows them to probe, to ask questions, and to express doubts. All the while, such new people are invited to take part in the life of the church, a community of growing disciples demonstrating the reality of the kingdom of heaven, lives being transformed by their relationships with God and one another. This is a church that understands its strategic location in the greater community, influences and prays for those within its sphere of influence, and sees itself as incarnational. It is a church in which faith is

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<sup>9</sup> D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 152-153.

caught because lives of faith and discipleship are ever present. While Carson does not express it, this church is one that is operating on principles found in the ancient Celtic monastic communities. Further, it is a church that is likely to be open to people steeped in postmodern worldviews—both open to people's expressions of doubt and questioning while simultaneously upholding the uniqueness of Christ without apology. It is a church that is utilizing an ancient strategy to build an outpost for God's kingdom.

With prayer and power from the Holy Spirit, WPC can become that church. Along the way, all who are growing in their discipleship at WPC will grow in their understand the supremacy of Christ to the glory of God.

## APPENDIX A

### THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interviews for the thesis project, *Celtic Evangelism in Rural America: Creating Contemporary Outreach Opportunities Using Ancient Methods* were conducted in this manner. Each person was contacted for the interview based on his or her work setting and social context in the Wyalusing area. Two people work in the local school district: one is an elementary teacher (having direct contact with students and their parents), and one works in the administration office. One person works in a neighboring school district as a nurse. The other two interviewees own businesses in the Wyalusing Borough. They were informed that their interviews would be part of this thesis project, but that their identities would remain anonymous.

The interviews were conducted in neutral locations that were very informal. The exception was the school nurse, who was interviewed over the phone. The interviews were conversational. Interviews took from twenty minutes to an hour, depending on how freely the interviewees responded. No one appeared nervous or uncomfortable during the interviews. After the interviewer asked the initial questions, the respondents were free to express their answers with as much detail as they wanted. One person prepared several pages of written material that she had prepared after being contacted about the interview from which she drew her answers.

The interview questions were:

1. What is the spiritual climate in your workplace?
2. How do you maintain your identity as a Christian in your workplace?
3. How does your identity as a Christian influence the climate of your workplace?
4. Do you pray for or with your coworkers, clients, or students?



5. What about your Christian identity in other areas of your life influences people positively?

The purpose of these questions was to ascertain how these members of WPC make use of the strategic location in which God has placed them.

Because of the conversational nature of the interviews, not every interviewee was asked every question. Some of the interviewees simply talked about what it was like to be a Christian in their work environment. The process was successful, and the interviewees provided good information.

## APPENDIX B

### THE TRANSFORMING CHURCH SURVEY FROM TCI

#### **The History of the TCI**

The TCI has been developed by a team from TAG, a management consulting firm, as an instrument to examine the key dimensions that reflect church health. TAG had assistance from Dan McAlister, a professor at the McDonough School of Business (Georgetown University) in the initial development of the instrument. The survey was originally designed around twelve concepts. Through comprehensive study of the TCI data, most recently by Brekke Associates, Inc., we have discovered 15 significant scales of church health that are organized conceptually within Five Key Indicators.

#### **How does the TCI Work?**

The TCI survey is completed confidentially either online or on paper by members of the congregation. If you completed the TCI online, TAG supplied the password and directions to your church's TCI administrator. If you used the paper version or a combination of paper and online, TAG sent a master copy of the survey to the TCI administrator. The TCI administrator was asked to photocopy and distribute the TCI to the potential respondents in your church, collect the surveys in sealed envelopes, and return them en masse to TAG.

The TCI contains statements, framed in the positive, to which the respondent indicates how much they agree or disagree. The entire survey takes, on average,

twenty minutes per respondent to complete. The survey statements have been designed to be easy to read and answer, and to be applicable across a variety of denominations and polities.

Each survey is scored on the 15 TCI scales, and average scale scores are computed for your congregation. Each of the scales measures a particular concept that is related to church transformation. Since each of these concepts is complex, each uses a specific set, or “cluster” of survey statements to capture the breadth and depth of the concept. By using a cluster of questions, rather than a single question, we get a more reliable picture of your congregation on each scale of church transformation. As a result, we focus on the scale scores to understand your congregation. At the same time, the scores on the individual survey statements may be helpful in pointing to very specific issues.

### **National Norms**

With over 23,000 records analyzed in the database, national norms have been created to give your church a relative benchmark. “Percentile scores” in this report are relative to this norm. The norm is based on all churches who have participated in the survey. This includes churches from virtually every major denomination, non-denominational churches, and churches of all sizes (ranging from under 50 to over 13,000 members). These churches represent the fabric of the American church: traditional churches, contemporary churches, inner city churches, rural churches, conservative churches, liberal churches, historic churches, church plants, and virtually every model that exists among Protestant churches in America. The survey is open to

anyone who participates in the life of a church, whether they are active members, inactive members, visitors, or leaders.

### **Who Is TAG?**

TAG is a management consulting firm, located near Washington DC. We work across a wide variety of industries – from the federal government and large corporations to small businesses and associations. But TAG has a unique passion for churches. We have a team of consultants who specialize in church consulting. For churches, we offer consulting services in strategic planning, leadership development, organizational development, executive coaching, stewardship/capital campaigns, and ministry/program development.

### **What is the Transforming Church Institute?**

The Transforming Church Institute is an ongoing membership-based organization that provides peer support and professional consulting from TAG to churches of all sizes and denominations. Churches that are looking for more than just a survey may join. The Transforming Church Institute builds on the concepts in this survey, but provides monthly conference calls and coaching for pastors across the United States. The backbone of the Transforming Church Institute is the “Peer Group”, which normally includes 3-4 pastors in the same region who are receiving coaching and consulting from TAG. Various membership levels are available that include a professional consultant from TAG conducting onsite assessments, facilitating strategic planning retreats, and conducting leadership training workshops.

For more information, visit [www.transformingchurch.net](http://www.transformingchurch.net); call 1-877-TAGLINE (ext 201 for church consulting) or email [kford@877tagline.com](mailto:kford@877tagline.com).

## **TCI Executive Summary<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The TCI analyzes the data several ways. In this Executive Summary, we first look at the characteristics of the survey respondents and the general level of statistical accuracy of your congregation's results. Then, a summary of the 15 Scales and the Composite Score (your church's average of the 15 Scales) is presented. We look at how your church compared to the national norm, and how demographic subgroups within your congregation compare. Finally, we take a more in-depth look at how your church scored on the Five Key Indicators.

This summary is an overview of how your church currently compares to national norms. It is intended to provide information, rather than interpretation. The best way to interpret this report is through a qualitative assessment. Consider having an outside consultant or facilitator conduct a series of focus groups that can help explain why your church responded the way it did to these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The information in Appendix B is from the TCI survey taken by the Wyalusing Presbyterian Church in October 2008. The figures were compiled by TAG.

## Your Church's TCI Respondents

Wyalusing Presbyterian Church had 37 respondents to the TCI. This means that the margin of error for the raw Composite Score (1-5 scale) is approximately  $\pm 0.17$  points. The distribution of the respondents on five demographic questions is shown in the tables below. (Percentages are based on valid responses.)

*How long have the respondents been involved at your church?*

<b>Less than 2 years</b>	<b>2-4 years</b>	<b>5-10 years</b>	<b>More than 10 years</b>
0 (0%)	2 (5%)	5 (14%)	30 (81%)

*How old are the respondents?*

<b>0-18</b>	<b>19-25</b>	<b>26-40</b>	<b>41-55</b>	<b>56-69</b>	<b>70+</b>
0 (0%)	2 (6%)	6 (17%)	10 (29%)	6 (17%)	11 (31%)

*What is their role in the church?*

<b>Pastor / Paid Staff</b>	<b>Volunteer Leader</b>	<b>Church Member</b>	<b>Non-Member</b>
1 (3%)	11 (31%)	21 (60%)	2 (6%)

*What is their marital status?*

<b>Single, never married</b>	<b>Divorced or widowed</b>	<b>Married, no children</b>	<b>Married with children</b>
3 (8%)	4 (11%)	2 (6%)	27 (75%)

*How many minutes do they travel to get to the worship service?*

<b>0-10 minutes</b>	<b>11-20 minutes</b>	<b>21-30 minutes</b>	<b>31+ minutes</b>
25 (69%)	8 (22%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)

## **Composite and 15 Scale Scores**

Compared to the national norm, your church's Composite Score was at the 43rd percentile, and was statistically not significantly different from the national average. Your church scored above the 50th percentile on 7 of the 15 Scales. The church's top three percentile scores were on the following scales: Personal Connection to Church's Purpose, Social Connections, and Caring Relationships. Your church scored below the 50th percentile on 8 of the 15 Scales. The church's lowest three percentile scores were on the following scales: Excitement About the Church, Unique Focus, and Innovation and Creativity.

### **Church's Relative Strengths**

Compared to the national norm, your church scored highest on the following questions:

- This church's buildings and facilities are effective in supporting our ministries.
- I am trusted around here.
- Everyone is free to speak his or her mind here.
- When one person is hurting around here, we effectively minister to that person.
- My church is...close-knit.
- I can make a difference around here.
- I am important around here.
- I am taken seriously around here.
- There is faith in me around here.
- In most conversations in this church, people are treated with respect.

### **Church's Relative Opportunities for Improvement**

Compared to the national norm, your church scored lowest on the following questions:

- Our church has an effective follow-up program for those who have visited our church.



- I am excited about where our church is headed in the next few years.
- The church promotes a healthy balance between work, home, and church responsibilities.
- Our leaders effectively establish the church's direction, purpose, and objectives.
- I am satisfied with our church's worship services.
- Our leaders effectively mentor other people in leadership roles.
- Our leaders are unified in purpose and direction.
- Lines of authority and responsibility are clear in this church.
- Our church strives to make a difference in people's lives outside of our own church.
- Our pastors and leaders do an excellent job of communicating expectations to members.

## **The Five Key Indicators**

### **Key Indicator 1: Consumerism / Community**

A healthy community is one where people experience a combination of several things. In a healthy community members experience social connections, caring relationships, and feel personally connected to the church's overarching purpose. This Key Indicator is measured by three Scales. These Scales help identify whether or not people are "consumers" or "partners in ministry". They help to identify the level of relational commitment to the church, and how much relational community they experience. Comparing your church to national norms, your members feel very connected to what the church is all about, your church has an exceptional atmosphere of fellowship and belonging, and in your church, individuals feel extremely valued and loved.

### **Key Indicator 2: Incongruence / Code**

A church's code is its identity, or personality. While the survey doesn't tell us what the church's code is, it does tell us whether or not people have a deep personal connection to what the church is all about. This Key Indicator is measured by three Scales. These scales measure respondents' general sense of excitement and enthusiasm about the church, their personal growth through the church, and whether or not they think the church has a unique sense of focus. Comparing your church to national norms, the church's leadership should explore why members are not excited about the church, your church scored very low in terms of having a clear sense of identity and focus, and your church is in the middle of the road when it comes to personal and spiritual growth.

### **Key Indicator 3: Autocracy / Shared Leadership**

Leadership is often too narrowly defined in many circles. In our research, leadership that mobilizes people for ministry is a combination of several factors. Effective leaders raise important and difficult issues with the people, engaging them in dialogue and discussion. Various points of view are respected and people are free to speak their minds. Members need to trust that leaders have the best interest of the church in mind. They need to know that the church's financial resources are effectively managed. And they need a sense that the church has clear objectives that are well-communicated and executed. Comparing your church to national norms, when it comes to raising tough issues and managing conflict, your church is close to the national norm, when it comes to trust in the church's leadership, you are pretty close to the national norm, your church is doing nicely when it comes to managing finances and financial communication, and according to the respondents, your church's leadership should improve the basics of management including setting the direction, accomplishing goals, and communicating with members about those things.

**Key Indicator 4: Cloister / Missional**

An outward focus is evident when a church meets a variety of needs. It includes meeting the needs of various demographic segments (children, seniors, singles, etc.). It also includes making a contribution to the local community. Comparing your church to national norms, your church is not much different from national norms when it comes to meeting the needs of various age groups, and your church is in the middle of the pack when it comes to making a difference in your community.

**Key Indicator 5: Inertia / Reinvention**

A healthy church must be able to reinvent itself. Change is inevitable. How a church handles change is critical. These scales examine the communication surrounding change, whether or not the church's members embrace change, and how innovative or creative the church is in its approach. Comparing your church to national norms, in terms of communication about change, your church is similar to national norms, your church is close to national norms in terms of how well members embrace change, and members believe that your church is not innovative or creative.

## Overall Summary

Your Composite Score is shown below, along with your scores for the 15 Scales organized within the Five Key Indicators, compared to the national norms. Your Composite Score is at the 43<sup>rd</sup> percentile and is not significantly different from the national average. A small percentage of people (3%) responded negatively.

	Percentile Score					%-ile		%
	0	25	50	75	100	Score		Neg
<b>Composite Score</b>						<b>43</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Key Indicator 1: Consumerism / Community</b>								
Personal Connection to Church's Purpose						<b>91</b>		<b>3</b>
Social Connections						<b>88</b>		<b>0</b>
Caring Relationships						<b>88</b>		<b>3</b>
<b>Key Indicator 2: Incongruence / Code</b>								
Personal Growth						<b>44</b>		<b>6</b>
Unique Focus						<b>18</b>		<b>12</b>
Excitement About the Church						<b>15</b>		<b>12</b>
<b>Key Indicator 3: Autocracy / Shared Leadership</b>								
Financial Leadership						<b>78</b>		<b>3</b>
Raising Issues						<b>57</b>		<b>18</b>
Trust in Leadership						<b>43</b>		<b>6</b>
Effective Management						<b>21</b>		<b>15</b>
<b>Key Indicator 4: Cloister / Missional</b>								
Most Needs						<b>54</b>		<b>15</b>
Local Impact						<b>45</b>		<b>12</b>

<b>Key Indicator 5: Inertia / Reinvention</b>								
Communication About Change						<b>59</b>		<b>6</b>
Embracing Change						<b>30</b>		<b>31</b>
<b>Innovation and Creativity</b>						<b>19</b>		<b>28</b>

This Table was reproduced and reformatted in order to fit within the thesis project.  
The original results were calculated and formulated by TAG.

## APPENDIX C

### CELTIC EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

#### SMALL GROUP STUDY

##### **Celtic Evangelism Small Group Orientation (the initial meeting)**

1. The Project Idea: to learn from the practices of Celtic monastic communities to shape this small group to more effectively impact people within each group member's sphere of influence for the kingdom of God.
2. The Purpose: to understand and improve personal outreach for the kingdom of God, and spread what is learned through the local church.
3. Session Themes (gleaned from George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000):
  - a. Prayers for our Spheres: for blessings and opportunities
  - b. Strategically located
  - c. Hospitality is key
  - d. Looking for Points of Contact
  - e. Incarnational Ministry
  - f. Invitation
  - g. Community is Vital
  - h. Faith is Caught
4. Session Format:
  - Meet together 8 times for worship, prayer, study, and discussion. Begin each meeting with a brief time of worship directed by *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and Readings from the Northumbria Community* (New York: Harper One, 2002). After worship, debrief/discuss any spiritual or evangelistic conversations that were recorded in the *Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger* during the previous week. Next, the group will study and talk about the theme for the day. Pray silently or aloud for those within each group member's sphere of influence. Conclude with the end of the *Celtic Daily Prayer* worship order.
  - Outside of the group meetings, look for opportunities throughout the 8-week period to engage people within each member's spheres of influence in spiritual and/or evangelistic conversations. The goal of each conversation is to at least open the door for further dialogue about these matters, and at best invite the person to receive Jesus as their Savior. Keep in mind that one of the greatest tools that the Celtic Christians utilized for reaching these goals was hospitality. Sometimes just extending an invitation to church, a church fellowship event, Sunday School, or further extension of hospitality can bring a person a few steps closer to a relationship with Jesus. The desired end result is that the people

contacted are introduced into the church family so that they can catch the faith that is demonstrated through the discipleship of the community.

- Keep a record of spiritual and/or evangelistic conversations in the *Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger* provided. Please write down any observations about these conversations. The group will debrief conversations together meetings. The group leader will use member's records and observations as part of the research for the thesis project. All names will be kept confidential.
- At the end of the 8 weeks, please give feedback on this exercise. What was good about it? What needs to be adjusted? Can we use this model to get more people into similar groups in the church? Do you think other churches would be interested in this type of small group plan?

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Introduction

This small group curriculum is meant to provide a jumping off point for guided discussion. If different questions or observations are more poignant for your group, do not feel that you must stick to what is provided in the curriculum. In the pilot group, the leader loosely guided the discussion, provided personal illustrations, and welcomed questions throughout each session.

### Session 1: Praying for Our Spheres of Influence.

Opening Worship: "Evening Prayer" from *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and Readings from the Northumbria Community*

#### Scripture readings

Psalm 22:31

Genesis 49:33

Matthew 28:19–20

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What do these passages have in common?

What are they telling us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: *Praying for our Sphere of Influence*

What we are embarking on is a transformation of our view of the world around us. By worshiping together in this small group—a community praying together, learning to view the people in our sphere of influence through the lenses of the Great Commission, and learning to see our own way of living as an evangelistic testimony and a demonstration of the kingdom of Heaven to those within that sphere—we have greater potential to impact our surroundings for God's kingdom as it unfolds in the world.

Remember that God's kingdom is like (Matthew 13:31-35):

- A mustard seed
- Leaven in a lump of dough

Think of how Jesus lived. What were some of the ways that he impacted his community (those within his sphere of influence) for God's kingdom?

1. First, who were the people within Jesus' sphere of influence?
2. How did he influence each person or group of people? Possible answers: *He influenced the disciples through association, teaching, and demonstration. He*



*influenced the religious leaders by confronting them with their own hypocrisy (they didn't like this, although Acts tells us that many Pharisees became disciples). He influenced the masses by exercising his spiritual authority—he healed many and freed many others from the bonds of evil. He influenced his enemies by loving them...*

Our lives are different from Jesus' life. What are some ways we can influence the people in our lives?

1. Who do find within your sphere of influence on a regular basis? (family, co-workers, people you are in other groups with, friends, neighbors, etc.).
2. What are some ways that you are best at influencing people for God's kingdom?

One of the ways we can dramatically influence people within our sphere of influence is to pray for them. Often, when we pray for the "felt needs" of the people in our sphere, it goes a long way toward softening them to hear the gospel.

Think of the people in your sphere. What do these people *need*? (Do they need healing? Do they need peace in their lives? What is the condition of their hearts? Do they need fallow ground broken up, rocky soil cleaned out, thorns and weeds pulled out of their lives? What is keeping them from coming to Christ or at least taking a step towards Christian community?).

Who can you pray for in your sphere of influence that needs peace with God? Write down their names, and keep them in the place where you will remember to pray for them. Over time, see if God will open any doors for you to any spiritual conversations.

#### **Spiritual Conversation Debriefing and Discussion:**

1. Introduce and pass out the *Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger*.
2. Did anyone have any spiritual conversations this week? If so, how did they go?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### **Session 2: Strategic Location: Living and Working in the World And the Church's Location as a Monastic Community.**

Opening Worship: "Evening Prayer" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### **Scripture reading**

1 Peter 3:15-16

#### **Discussion of the Scripture Readings.**

What does this passage tell us about God?

What does this passage tell us about ourselves?

What does this passage tell us about sharing our faith?

**Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger:** Discuss and Debrief

#### **Discussion of Today's Topic: Strategically Located**

What is one of the most important marketing tools of every business? *Location, location, location.*

George Hunter says, "...the Celtic Christians built their monastic communities in locations accessible to the traffic of the time, like proximity to settlements, or on hilltops, or on islands near the established sea lanes."<sup>1</sup> The Celtic monastics intentionally set up their communities so that they could easily reach neighboring settlements, and so that they were easily accessible by their neighbors. They looked for strategic locations from which they could spread the kingdom of God.

What does 1 Peter 3:15-16 have to do with strategic location for evangelism?

What places that you frequent might be good places to engage people in spiritual or evangelistic conversations?

How can you make yourself available for this kind of personal encounter?

In what ways are you strategically located to help advance the kingdom of God in your community? ...in your job? ...in your family? ...on a daily basis?

In what ways is our church strategically located to reach the surrounding community for Christ?

How can your church best make use of its location?

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<sup>1</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

If you were asked to share the reason for the hope that you have, what would you say? How would such a conversation go?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of “Evening Worship” from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 3: Hospitality

Opening Worship: "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture readings

2 Kings 4:37

Matthew 25:37-40

Acts 16:11-15

Romans 12:13

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What do these passages have in common?

What are they telling us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

**Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger:** Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: Hospitality

How do you like to have people in your home? What are you like when people show up unexpectedly?

Here are some quotes from George Hunter, III's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* that illustrate the importance of hospitality for the Celtic monastic communities and effective evangelism today:

The fourth theme [of the Celtic Way of being and evangelistic community] is the role of the monastic community's Hospitality in ministry with seekers, visitors, refugees, and other "guests." We have seen that one Celtic approach to pre-Christian people involved a team from the monastic community penetrating the natural community of the target population. We no feature the approach of inviting seekers, refugees and others, individuals and even families to be guests of the monastic community.

Put yourself in the place of a seeker, or a refugee, or an abused teenager, who has been invited to visit a monastic community, and you have found your way there. What would you experience? You would meet a "porter" stationed near the monastic community's entrance, whose chief role is to welcome guests and introduce them to the rest of the community. The abbot, and everyone else, would welcome you with "all courtesy of love." The abbot would gently inquire about what had prompted your visit (and so begin the ministry of conversation), and he would read a scripture for you, offer a prayer for you, and extend the "kiss of peace." The abbot would wash your feet (from your journey by foot), and would show you to the guest house—which would be managed by a caring brother who would give you

bedding. You would be included at the Abbot's table at meals; if the Abbot was in a period of fasting, he would break the fast—for the Abbot has no higher priority than ministry with guests. You would learn that the monastic community's highest commitment is hospitality to strangers, seekers, pilgrims, and refugees. The Benedictine Rule #53 explains that "all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'"

Soon you would be given a soul friend, a small group, and a place for periods of solitude. You would learn some scripture; you would worship with the community. One or more persons share the ministry of conversation and pray with you, daily. After some days or weeks, you would find yourself believing what these Christians believe, and they would invite you to commit your life to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

[John] Finney reports that most people experience the faith through relationships, that they encounter the gospel through a community of faith, that becoming a Christian involves a process that takes time.<sup>3</sup>

In his later book, *Recovering the Past*, Finney summarizes their chief finding in four words. For most people, "belonging comes before believing."<sup>4</sup>

How have you personally experienced hospitality by members of the church?

How does our church rate when it comes to extending hospitality to "seekers," "refugees," or others who have been storm-drenched by the world?

What could we do better? What plan could we have to prioritize hospitality to those who come to our door?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

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<sup>2</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West... Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 53.

<sup>3</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 54-55, quoting John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (British Foreign Bible Society, 1992), 46-47.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 54, quoting John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd, 1996).

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 4: Looking for Points of Contact (or Contextualization)

Opening Worship: “Evening Worship” from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture reading

Acts 17:16-34

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What does this passage tell us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

What point of contact did Paul use to talk to the Athenians about Jesus?

Was he successful?

**Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger:** Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today’s Topic: Points of Contact

Let’s talk for a few minutes about what we have in common.

Music? What flavor ice cream (or other kinds of food)? Hobbies? What brings you to this part of the country, especially out here in the rural areas?

How do you determine what you have in common with someone you have just met?

In Acts 17:16-34, Paul identified points of contact that he could use to introduce the Athenians to the idea of God sending his Son into the world to save the world. It is important to recognize that Paul had a singular purpose in life: to make disciples for Jesus. Those disciples he would eventually form into churches, as Acts records frequently.

One challenge from this passage is Paul’s prime directive: to make disciples. He used his perceived points of contact to create an opportunity to do what he lived to do.

What would you say your prime directive is? Is there anything that needs to change about this?

A second challenge from this passage is *contextualization*. What points of contact might you identify with a person—what things might you find in common that could lead into a spiritual conversation, a dialogue, or a chance to share your faith?

#### Possible activity:

1. Role-play two friends meeting at a coffee shop. One friend identifies and uses points of contact or at least some common interests to create an opportunity to talk about their faith.

2. Role-play two friends working on a building project sponsored by a local community group. One friend uses the situation to identify points of contact through which he can share his faith with the other.
3. Role-play a dinner party at which the host couple is Christian. The Christian couple talks with other guests, and in doing so determines what they have in common. Using these points of contact, they try to open up a spiritual conversation with others.

Discuss and debrief these situations.

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 5: Incarnational Ministry

Opening Worship: "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture readings

1 Corinthians 12:27

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

1 Peter 3:8-16

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What do these passages have in common?

What are they telling us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

**Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger:** Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: Incarnational Ministry

What do you think of when you hear this word: INCARNATION? *Jesus was God Incarnate, it means the embodiment of some otherworldly life.*

The Celtic Monastics and Incarnation:

Their goal was to seek God, and they did so by living communally within the monastic communities. As they grew closer to God, they had a greater effect on their neighbors. Their lives were ordered around prayer, Scripture, daily work, and morning and evening worship. Their relationships with God rubbed off. God used them as they simply lived in relationship with God.

In what ways ought that be true of us individually? ...as the church?

How do you think simply living close to God might lead to spiritual conversations, invitations to church, and conversions?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.



## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 6: Invitation

Opening Worship: "Morning Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture readings

John 1:35-46

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What does this passage tell us about Jesus?

What does it tell us about ourselves?

#### Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger: Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: Invitation

Do you feel more comfortable when someone invites you to come to a special event or when someone *tells* you to come to a special event (and if you do not comply, you are not getting the most out of your life)?

If you did not grow up in church, then how did you come to attend? What brought you to *our* church?

Each of us has had five weeks of emphasis on having spiritual and hopefully evangelistic conversations with people.

How do you feel about talking to people about Jesus and what he has done for you at this point?

Are you as anxious about this as you were a few weeks ago?

Has God answered any of your prayers for people that you specifically want to talk to?

In John 1:35-46, what did Jesus say to Andrew and the other disciple of John's when they began to follow him? (See verses 37-38).

How did Andrew get his brother Simon Peter to follow Jesus? (See verses 40-42).

How did Jesus get Philip to follow him? (See verse 43).

How did Philip get Nathaniel to follow Jesus? (See verses 44-46).

As we talked about earlier, the one thing these passages have in common is a simple invitation. How do you feel about a simple invitation to come and see what Jesus is like over a more confrontational approach to sharing your faith?

If our church is a community that emphasizes and practices discipleship, then an invitation to a friend, relative, or even someone that you have just met to come and see what Jesus is up to at our church may have a lasting long-term effect. Even if they are not ready to believe in him, at least they can be welcomed into the church through an outpouring of hospitality. Once they are initially welcomed, they can be invited to participate in Sunday School, a Bible study, or even an existing small group. As they grow more comfortable at the church, they can grow more comfortable with the idea of believing in Jesus.

Think of people in your circle of influence that you can invite to church. Share their names if you feel comfortable doing so, and we will pray for them, for you, and for an opportunity to invite them to church.

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of “Morning Worship” from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 7: Community is Vital

Opening Worship: "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture readings

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 133

Ephesians 2:19-22

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What do these passages have in common?

What are they telling us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

What do they say about how God wants us to live?

#### Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger: Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: Community is Vital

#### Distinctive Characteristics of Celtic Monastic Communities and Comparison to WPC

1. Celtic monastic communities organized to penetrate the pagan world and to extend the church.<sup>5</sup> What is our church's purpose within the surrounding community?
2. Celtic leaders often organized monastic communities to save other people's souls.<sup>6</sup> Is our church organized to do anything like this?
3. The Celtic Christians built their monastic communities in locations accessible to the traffic of the time, like proximity to settlements, or on hilltops, or on islands near the established sea-lanes.<sup>7</sup> How accessible is our church to the surrounding community?
4. Celtic monastic communities housed some priests, monks, and nuns, but also teachers, scholars, craftsmen, artists, farmers, families, and children.<sup>8</sup> What kinds of people populate our church? How might this population help visitors feel welcome?
5. The Celtic monastic community marked its day by this threefold division: worship, study, and work.<sup>9</sup> How could our church imitate and facilitate a similar daily division?

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<sup>5</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 28.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 28-29.

6. The Celtic monastic community appears organized to demonstrate the kingdom of heaven to the world. How does our church do?
7. The Celtic monastic communities produced a less individualistic and more community-oriented approach to the Christian life. How does our church compare? What changes can we make to become a more community-oriented church?
8. If our church tended toward the model of the Celtic monastic community, how might more people be attracted to our church?

Other questions:

How has being a part of this church family (community) impacted your spiritual life?

In what ways is our church family open? Closed?

What barriers find to moving into the church family might new people?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Session 8: Faith is Caught

Opening Worship: "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*

#### Scripture readings

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Judges 21:25

2 Timothy 1:3-6

#### Discussion of the Scripture Readings.

What do these passages have in common?

What are they telling us about God?

What are they telling us about ourselves?

What do they say about how people come to faith (or miss it)?

#### Evangelism and Spiritual Conversations Contact Ledger: Discuss and Debrief

#### Discussion of Today's Topic: Faith is Caught<sup>10</sup>

1. Do you learn better in a classroom or a lab?
2. Some people grow up in the church. Some people come to faith in Christ in a flash, then start coming to church. How was it for you?
3. Can you name some pivotal points in your spiritual growth?
4. How important would you say belonging to a church has been to your spiritual growth? What parts of church involvement have most contributed to your spiritual growth?
5. In the Celtic Monastic Communities, the operating wisdom was that *faith is caught*. We might reverse the common paradigm of people entering into a church from this:
  - Believe—believe the gospel, receive what Jesus has done for you, and be baptized;
  - Become/behave—begin to practice discipleship in the church family;
  - Belong—now accepted as a faithful member of the church family......to this:
  - Belong—as a seeker, inquirer, or even a doubter, enter into (or be invited to explore) the church community;
  - Become/behave—by participating in the life of the church, building relationships with hospitable church members, and entering into the discipleship ministries of

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<sup>10</sup> George Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 54.

the church, the seeker/inquirer/doubter begins to identify with the church family, and get involved as part of the community; come to understand and accept what Jesus has done for you;

- Believe—through participation in the life of the church and relationships with others who are practicing discipleship and growing in spiritual maturity, the seeker/inquirer/doubter “catches” faith—he or she realizes that the do believe in the faith of the community, confess Jesus as Savior and Lord and get baptized.<sup>11</sup>

Living in the community helped one see that Christianity is more than just a list of propositions to learn. Faith in Christ emerged as people lived with faithful people who practiced Christian discipleship. As they prayed with, worked with, studied with, and worshiped with Christians, inquirers “caught” faith in Christ.<sup>12</sup>

How well do we already do some of this in our church?

What can we do so that children in our church can catch faith in Jesus?

What can we do so that newcomers to our church can catch that faith?

**Prayers for others** (Pray for those within your sphere of influence that you want to come to faith in Christ and pray for their perceived felt needs).

**Closing:** Conclusion of “Evening Worship” from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.

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<sup>11</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 54-55.

## CELTIC EVANGELISM SMALL GROUP

### Closing and Evaluation

#### Themes we discussed:

1. Prayers for our Spheres: for blessings and opportunities
2. Strategically located
3. Hospitality is key
4. Looking for Points of Contact
5. Incarnational Ministry
6. Invitation
7. Community is Vital
8. Faith is Caught

Which theme was most helpful to you?

Which theme is the easiest for you to incorporate into your life?

Which theme is the most challenging?

Overall, how did your spiritual conversations go?

Was it helpful to talk about evangelism and Celtic monastic communities with a group of people that you know and trust?

How do you think the themes we have discussed could help our church grow? How could they benefit the community in which we live?

**Closing:** "Evening Worship" from *Celtic Daily Prayer*.





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